

Title: Mage Harry

Rating: PG-13, A/U, Humor, Adventure

Main Pairing: Harry/Ginny

Summary: Summer before 6th year, an accident unlocks Harry's secret power: He's a Mage with the power of Merlin. Watch Harry deal with it and take control of his life. Independent Harry. (H/G)

A/N: After reading Bobmin's "Exposure", I felt like writing a super!Harry story, not having ever written one of those before. Doing so confirmed a theory I've had, which is explained at the end of the story. I borrowed the Mage aura from Bobmin's story, any other similarities are unintentional. This will be 3 longish chapters, or about 45K-words total. Also note that I decided to try a story written in 1st person; hopefully, it works.

I need to give a big thanks to my beta editor Wolfs\_Scream. He always makes me look like a better writer than I am. I really appreciate his help.

And for those who are wondering, I've sorta figured out my problem and ch 3 of Lily's Child is on the move -- finally. :)

Mage Harry

Chapter 1 - The Power

I idly pushed the hand spade into the ground to remove a weed. I suppose I should have been working faster, as Uncle Vernon was checking on me from time to time, but I had all summer to do chores so I just didn't care too much, given what I had recently endured. This work was manual labor pure and simple, not like an adventure or anything.

An adventure would describe my life a few weeks ago. Five of my best friends and I had snuck off to the Department of Mysteries to try to save my godfather, only to find it had been a trap: he wasn't even there until he came to rescue me, and he had ended up getting killed in the fighting. I still felt the grief and guilt over that. Oh, I know that it wasn't solely my fault -- Snape, Dumbledore, and Bella each had a large part to play in that drama -- but I still felt guilty. It really made

me wish I had a lot more power, sort of like what Dumbledore suggested I should have: A power He knows not.

Right, the bloody prophecy says I have a power Volde-monkey doesn't know. Better still, Dumbledore says it's love. Ha, I snort in his general direction. Infatuation I might know about, but I think love is beyond me at the moment. I truly hope Dumbledore is wrong on what the power is.

But I follow Dumbledore for the moment, such as by staying here with my relatives. I don't want to be here, but Dumbledore insisted and it was hard to deny Dumbledore's reason of staying safe after I had just played a major game of "Hex Harry" with Volde-snake and his Death Munchers, which had gotten all of my friends hurt. Fortunately, none of them had died; no, only my godfather had died. Also fortunate for me, none of them blamed me for getting injured.

A drop of water hit me on the head and I looked up. It seems the dark clouds have decided to give us an unexpected rain in mid-July. The sound of thunder makes up my mind for me. I had considered just working in the rain to stay away from them, but thunder and lightning convince me to put the tools up and go in, no matter how much I don't like my relatives.

I put the tools up in the metal shed in corner of the back garden. As I was closing it up, it happened. A freak storm let go of a freak bolt of lightning to hit a freak boy -- me. Try as I might, I could not make my hands let go of the metal shed door until the strike finished. When it did, I dropped to my knees and then pitched forward onto the grass. I think I blacked out for a moment, or maybe "whited out," as everything had gone blazing white for a long moment. I can't even describe what being hit by lightning feels like. Really, I can't, because I couldn't feel much of anything as I started to regain my senses.

I'm not sure how long I lay face down, able to see only green stuff and smell the earth, but I'm sure it was some time. My whole body started tingling and I'd swear I could feel my blood flowing, or maybe that was something else, I wasn't sure. One thing I was sure was that I hurt like hell as feeling came back into my body and my limbs did not want to respond to me, other than twitching on their own.

My hearing did work though, which was surprising as you always get thunder with lightning. I knew my ears worked because I heard my dear Uncle Vernon shout at me. "Boy! Quit lying around and get back to work! It's not even hot any more!"

Moody and company's little talk with Vernon about behaving better had helped for all of one week before he was back to normal. I mean, I get hit with lightning and he can't care at all? Bloody bastard!

Trying my hardest to move my arms so I can get up, I'm sure you can imagine my surprise when I start levitating up a few inches. I let out an "ahh" and promptly fall back down. Good thing I was on grass. I do manage to move my head a little and note that Vernon is no longer at the back door. Thank goodness for small favors. I can easily imagine his reaction if he'd seen what I just did, and it wouldn't be pleasant.

As feeling continued to return to my limbs, with supreme effort, I move my arms up and manage to roll over onto my back. A light rain was coming down from the dark skies, but what really grabbed my attention was my hands and arms. There's a dim blue aura over my skin, and there are little blue flames coming out of the aura. Lifting my head a little, I pulled up my T-shirt and saw the same thing on my chest and stomach. I drop my head back down and contemplate the latest quirk in my life.

With everything else that's happened to me, what's an aura, and with blue flames to boot? I look at my hands again and wonder if I can make the aura go away, although the idea of letting Vernon see me like this is tempting. I wonder if he'd pop that blood vessel in his head...?

Thinking about the aura for a few moments, I see that it gradually dims and is soon gone, as are the little blue dancing flames. As happy as I am for that small favor, I did notice that I felt something moving within me as I did that. It was strangely exhilarating.

Getting up, I can't help but notice what a mess I am. I snicker as I think about my Aunt Petunia's reaction to me walking in her house at the moment all covered in dirt and grass. "Why not?" I say out loud

and proceed to go inside. I would like to get into some cleaner and drier clothes.

I barely make it into the back door when I encounter Vernon. A Vernon with a big sandwich in his hand. An another example of why he's twice the man he should be.

"Boy, what are you doing in here? Get back out and finish the job, or else!" he says threateningly.

"No, I don't think so," I tell him, fed up with their treatment of me.

"I can throw you back out there and you'll stay until the job is done," he tells me as he starts walking towards me.

Tired of this behavior from him, I put up my hand towards him and imagine pushing. I don't know why I did that, but it seemed like the right thing to do. Well, color me surprised -- it actually did something. It was only after Vernon and his sandwich went flying backwards into the wall behind him, knocking pictures down on both sides of the wall, and putting some very serious cracks in the plaster that I noticed the bluish aura and flames were back on my hand. I shook my hand like I was trying to fling mud off of it and the aura and flames went away. Freaky.

Vernon was staring at me in fright for a second, but his fear slowly turned into a look of glee. "You used magic. They're going to toss you out of your freak school now. Then it will be up to me to decide what to do with you." He looked so happy that his lost sandwich was forgotten.

I look at him for a moment and contemplate that. Then reality hit me and I started to laugh, which made him look at me strangely. "No, I don't think so," I finally said when I got my breath back. "You see, I found out recently that they need me. They need me to do something no one else can do. I view it as a free pass, but we can see which one of us is right. I'm going to go take a shower and get cleaned up. If you're right, there will be an owl waiting on me when I'm done. If I'm right, there won't be any notification at all." I smirk at him as if I had already won and walk out of the room.

Thirty minutes later, I had had a hot shower and was now dressed in dry clothes. I hated these clothes as they didn't fit me at all, but at least they were clean and dry. If there really is no warning letter from the Ministry, I think I'll do something about them.

Tromping downstairs, I find Vernon looking out the window.

"Well, there were no owls upstairs other than Hedwig, and I don't see any down here," I tell him smugly, enjoying every second. "I believe that means I'm right. So that means I can get away with magic all I want now." The look of fear in his eyes was a joy to behold. "Therefore, I think it's time for Dudley to do some chores around here, because I'm not doing anything else."

He got mad. "Now you listen here, you ungrateful whelp..."

"No, you listen. For fifteen years you've been treating me like a slave. No more," I tell him forcefully as I wave my hand in a cutting motion. "Because of the way things are, I can't walk out of here right now, but if I could, I promise you I would. So I'll be here the rest of this summer and you and your family will leave me alone. In return, I'll leave all three of you alone. Then when I leave at the end of the summer, that's it. We can call it quits and never see each other again." I suspected Dumbledore wouldn't like that and would want me to return next summer until my seventeenth birthday, but I had just decided that wasn't going to happen.

"Well..." I could see him thinking about it.

"I don't think you understand, Vernon. There's nothing for you to decide. That's the way it's going to be. For once, I will have an easy summer and then I'm gone. You can't throw me out because I'll wish you away." I gave a little wave of my hand again and he was shoved a foot backwards. His earlier look of horror is back. "The same holds true for your stuck-up wife, who I'm starting to believe really isn't my mother's sister, and for your precious Dudley-poo. You tell them to leave me alone or they can go flying across the room too."

Vernon stared at me, obviously not believing the situation he was in now, but it's also obvious that he couldn't figure a way out of my unilateral decision.

Ignoring him, now that I've told him how it will be, as I've got the magic blue hand to enforce my will, I turn around and rummage in the fridge. I pull out a huge snack, twice what I normally eat, but is still less than half of what Dudley eats. Before I head to my room, I notice that Vernon is still puzzling through my ultimatum. With a smirk, I head off; I have things to think about and do.

While I eat, I think about what's happened to me today. I got hit by lightning and now it looks like I can do wandless magic and I don't get in trouble for it. Go, me! I wonder what else I can do.

After polishing off my meal, I decide that it's time to redecorate, or to at least try. Thinking very carefully, I wave my hand over my bed and think about it becoming bigger and it does. "Yes!" I hiss. I wonder if that came out in English or Parseltongue? No matter...

Of course, just because my bed is now the size of the one I have at Hogwarts does not make it as comfortable. I think really hard about how to fix that, hoping some spell I've learned will come to mind. After nearly fifteen seconds, the idea for a spell comes to me. Somewhat frighteningly, it's one I don't remember learning in school. But, in for a Knut, in for a Galleon: I try it anyway. I'm pleasantly surprised to see the mattress plump up, and upon testing it out, find that it's now very comfortable.

I'm very happy about that, but it does leave me wondering how I knew what to do. It also shows me another problem to solve. A big bed is great, unless you have the smallest bedroom in the house. Knowing this is possible, even though I know I don't have clue how, I think very hard about space expansion, hoping for another miracle.

Another quarter minute later, the thought of a special rune and a charm come to mind. With careful thought, I make magic come out of the end of my index finger. I draw the rune on the wall and then cast the charm. When I end the charm, I see that my room is now four times its previous size and quite reasonable for me. However, I really

should investigate what I did. Sticking my head out the window, I see the outside wall is still straight. Perfect. Checking the hall, I see the hall is still normal looking, so I deem that a success. Of course, there was a fly in the potion. My closet is a separate room, so it is still tiny. The same rune and charm fix that.

I spend the next ten minutes fixing up my room. When I'm done, it looks pretty nice with decent furniture and none of Dudley's junk. That makes me wonder where Vanished items go. I'll have to ask Hermione, or else give it some deep thought later, since it seems I can pull answers out of thin air. Oh, Hermione will like that -- not!

The next thing that catches my eye is my clothes. Well, shouldn't transfiguration be able to fix that? It seems like it, but I don't recall learning that in class. You know, that would be a really useful, as in "needing it to live" useful, thing to know. Why don't they teach us that in class? Oh well. I think hard about it and figure it out and a few minutes later, all of my clothes are now my size and look brand new. Plus, they are in colors I like.

Having improved my life immensely over the last couple of hours, I decide to lie down and rest. I feel pretty tired. Perhaps I've been overdoing it with all of this wandless magic. It is early evening, so I could go to bed.

I strip down to my boxers and crawl in, enjoying my new bed. I also think about where I am -- in life I mean.

Sirius is gone and that's still sad. I'm getting slightly better, but it's slow. I didn't get to spend as much time with him as I would have liked, either, and now I never will. I'd try to substitute Remus into that spot, but in truth, I really don't know him that well. Ignoring class time in my third year, I've seen less of Remus than Sirius. It's like he thinks he should care, but doesn't, or maybe he's afraid to be around me. I laugh sarcastically to myself. Perhaps that makes Remus the smartest of them all: I am trouble. Well, it's a good thing I'm almost an adult.

Dumbledore is around and he's trying to be nice to me again. I'm not sure what to think about him. I trust him in some ways and not so

much in others right now. He's made some really big mistakes with me. I know no one's perfect, but I mean really... He never should have put me here with the Dursleys and he should have told me about my destiny a lot sooner so I could have started training or learning more. Oh, and let's not forget about what he's allowed Snape to do to me or about not telling me about my connection to Volde-mold, which allowed Sirius to get killed. And let's also not forget about all the wonderful Defense Against the Dark Arts instructors he's hired to train me and everyone else, I think sarcastically.

Hedwig took that moment to fly in and she had a couple of letters. "Hey, girl," I told her lovingly as I petted her. She really was my best friend. She rubbed her head against my hand before sticking her leg out. I removed the letters and let her sit with me while I read.

The first was from Ron. All he wrote about was complaining about how bad it was at "HQ" and how he didn't get to go flying there. The second letter was from Hermione. She went on and on telling me to not feel bad about Sirius and that I need to face my feelings, as well as how she couldn't wait see her OWL results. I couldn't stop the sigh. Neither of them really said anything of importance. It was like the communication blackout of last summer. Some friends they were, but they are about all I have, so I supposed I can't be too picky.

Not really knowing what else to do, and still being tired, I snuggled down in my bed while Hedwig flew to the window sill and made herself comfortable. It was the best night's sleep I've ever had in this house.

The next morning I was awakened by a shriek. I flew out of bed and went into a crouch, flaming blue hands in front of me, which caused another shriek. It took me a moment, but I decided it was probably the hands that freaked my aunt out and not the fact that I was only in my boxers. Still, I would have preferred a polite knock to wake me up. Trying to maintain some sort of dignity, I summoned my pants that were hanging on the chair to my desk and quickly put them on. My aunt looked like she was about to shriek again, but managed to contain it this time.



“What?” I ask, hoping this won’t be an embarrassing conversation. My boxers were a plain gold color with no pictures, so I don’t think they were going to be the topic of conversation. Now, if I had had red hearts all over them, well, then I could see where I might have caused problems.

“What have you done to our house?” she asked fearfully, eyes darting around my room as if searching for a hidden dragon that might pop out at any moment.

Oh, right, I’d done “eeeeevil magic”. “Nothing much, I just expanded the room so I could have a decent place to live for the summer. Did Vernon tell you the deal?” I would have expected him to, but you can’t always predict what Vernon will do.

She nodded.

“OK, then. I’ll probably spend most of my time in here or the back garden, so you won’t have to worry about the neighbors. I’ll join you at dinner, but otherwise, I’ll leave everyone alone as long as you leave me alone.”

“But, but the room...” she sounded horrified.

I shrugged. “Don’t worry, I’ll put it back when I leave.”

She looked like she wanted to say a lot more, but she only shuddered and backed out, closing the door behind her. A successful interaction, or so it seemed to me.

Looking at my clock, which a quick Reparo had fixed, I noted it was after nine, so I got dressed to start my day. “What to do?” I ask myself.

Breakfast sounds good, so I go downstairs and make myself some toast and grab some fruit. We’re getting a little low on food, but I don’t complain. Aunt Petunia will probably go shopping today.

Next I decide to get my summer homework done early for once. Having a decent desk and all the answers floating around should make it a breeze. For once, summer homework is actually enjoyable.

That makes me realize that it probably wouldn't hurt to learn a few advanced things. I mean, being able to pull arcane knowledge out of the air is great, but it's not fast either. It would help to truly learn some useful things. Also, it didn't take me long to realize that while I can "know" (or ask "Magic") how to expand a room, I can't do the same thing to know how to dance or the appropriate robes to wear when I go to a birthday party. It seems that Magic can only tell me about magical things. Who knew?

Grabbing my Gringotts key, I decide to take my life into my own hands and walk out the front door. I stop and sniff. Yuck! Stale cigar and other odors I never want to know about are in the air. Fletcher is nearby. Thinking about it for a moment, I figure out how to see magic and voilà! I see an "invisible" lump not far away. A quick sleep charm ensures that I'll not be missed. He was probably asleep anyway.

I walk to the park to catch the Knight Bus to Diagon Alley. Just before I stick my wand out, it occurs to me that I need to be in disguise. Waving my hand over myself, I become blond and my face looks rounder. My scar also disappears.

I call the bus and get on. As I ride, I wonder why Sirius didn't use glamours to get out more often. I guess I'll never know.

No one recognizes or stops me anywhere. I get money at the bank, both Galleons and Pounds. Surprise, surprise, I find that I now own number twelve Grimmauld and my vault is a lot fuller, thanks to Sirius's will being executed. It was hard to hold the tears in when the goblins told me, but I managed by the slimmest of margins. The loss of Sirius was still pretty raw and hurt.

Since I have some extra money, courtesy of my late godfather, I stop in at the Quidditch supply store and pick up some broom parts and books on how brooms work. I've always been interested in how they work and have wondered if I could make one or not. I don't expect to make the next Firebolt, but it will give me something to do as a hobby.

After stopping at the bookstore, a good-sized stack of books on various topics also comes home with me. I got a little something on a lot of topics. Hermione would be impressed. Just for fun, I also get a Wizarding Wireless Radio.

On the way back, I realize there is a Muggle bookstore next to the Leaky Cauldron, so I go in there. Several "How Things Work" and various topics "Explained" books come home with me, as well as some spiral notebooks and pens. Perhaps some Muggle ideas can be used in the Magical world. The book explaining Physics looked very interesting. It might even help me when I made my broom.

Fletcher is still asleep when I get back to my relative's house. I shake my head as I go in. He's so worthless at this job; I hope he does other useful things for the Order.

I spend the rest of the day studying and it's actually fun. Of course, having some music and a comfortable recliner (transfigured from an old pillow) help a lot.

Dinner was uncomfortable. I mean, all three of them stared at me the whole time I ate. I didn't eat nearly as much as Dudley, but I ate my fill for once. Vernon didn't seem to like that, but he kept quiet. When I finish, I start back to my room.

"Harry?" My aunt called, but then she stopped, as if afraid to say anything more.

"Oh, right, sorry," I told her in a tone that almost sounded like I really was sorry. With a wave of my hand, my dishes floated up and went to the kitchen on their own, as well as started washing themselves. Petunia whimpered while the other two continued their forced silence, although they did look a little fearful. I just shrugged and went on up to my room. I grin to myself as I think that perhaps that wasn't what she was going ask about.

I had been learning some interesting things all afternoon and wanted to continue. In a bizarre way, I could almost understand Hermione better now. It was a truly scary thought that I did my best to forget as quickly as possible.

The next morning started out well until I got to the kitchen. There, I find that there are no eggs or bacon. All of Dudley's cereals are gone too. I grab some toast and fruit again. I did pay enough attention in class to know not to conjure food; small amounts of water, are OK, but not food. It doesn't last and can actually hurt you when it disappears. Now, if I could only make food that would sit on the store shelves for several weeks, but would disappear five minutes after you ate it, and before your body absorbed it, I'd have the ultimate "feel good diet food" and would be rich. I'll have to think about that. Maybe if I put the disappearing part on a timer after the package was opened ... hmm.

Breakfast was a bust though. Walking around the house, I find Aunt Petunia and Dudley coming in from the garage. "There's no eggs or bacon," I tell her, hoping to hear that she was going shopping soon.

"I know," she told me, as if I should have known too. She looked at Dudley and motioned for him to go up to his room and for once, my pig-shaped cousin obeyed without a word, scampering up the stairs as fast as his legs would take him. She then seemed to steel herself with determination as if she was about to face Volde-snot himself. "We've decided that since you want to be left alone, you're on your own for everything. We'll be eating out for the rest of the summer. We also have plans to be gone for a summer holiday to visit Marge for a week or so next week. We expect the house to be kept up and normal when we return. Will you agree to that?"

Damn! She's actually being reasonable, or at least reasonable for her. "Sure," I told her, not even really thinking about it or what it might really mean to me.

She nodded once in acknowledgement and walked up to her bedroom.

While I sort of wondered what she did during the day, I had a bigger problem on my hands: food. Well, there was a grocery store about three quarters of a mile away. Mrs Figg always walked there, so I knew I could too. Not having anything else to do this morning, I went up to my room, got my Muggle money, and went out of the house.

I stood on the front porch and stretched. Going now would be good, as it would be hot later. Ready, I started off on my walk, at least until I hit the end of the driveway.

"Where are you going?" came a feminine voice from the bushes.

That stopped me in my tracks. I had at least two options, but I decided the voice was the younger one. "I'm going to the store, Tonks. Is that a problem?" I asked as innocently as I could.

"Actually, it is, Harry. That's much too far away. Your little park is at the very limits as it is."

"Well, that's going to be a problem," I told her a little sarcastically. Sarcasm was really starting to grow on me as the summer went by for some reason I couldn't explain. Of course, Sarcasm had been a close friend of mine last year thanks to Umbridge, now that I think about it.

"Why?"

"Well, my relatives decided to leave me alone and also decided that meant I was on my own for everything, which includes food."

"What?" She sounded really put out. "They're not feeding you?"

"That sums it up pretty well. At least this time I get the use of the kitchen and get to eat whatever I cook. In the past I'd just get sent to my room with nothing." With the way she was spluttering, I guess my past was still mostly unknown.

Eventually, she settled down. "Can you wait an hour or two? I get off soon and will go get you some things."

"I suppose," I told her with disappointment. In fact, I sounded a little whiney when I considered it. "Sorry, I didn't mean that like it sounded. I would be grateful, but I was also thinking about enjoying the walk and getting out. You know?"

“Actually I do,” she said with a sigh. “I’d let you go if I could. Do me a favor and stay here though. I get off in about an hour and I’ll get enough food for a couple of days and be back before lunch. By the time you run out of that, we should have determined what to do for the rest of the summer.”

“I guess I won’t starve before then. OK, come knock on the door when you get back.” A humorous thought occurred and I almost let it happen, but there was no need to rock the boat that much. “You probably shouldn’t have pink hair though.”

She chuckled. “Right, I can do that. Go get a tan in the back garden or something. I’ll find you with food as soon as I can.”

“OK, but I think I’ll wait in the house.” I left her chuckling as I went in. Working on a tan might not be a bad idea for the afternoon. Of course, it would be a lot better with a girl to rub lotion on my back. I almost blushed at the good feelings that thought produced.

In my room, I considered that question. Having a girlfriend could be nice. Who could I see? Perhaps more importantly, who would want to see me? Other than Hermione, who I wouldn’t ask out because I knew Ron had a thing for her and, truth be known, I saw her more like a favorite cousin, I couldn’t think of anyone I really wanted to date. Parvati and Lavender were easy on the eyes, but too flighty. Padma might work, but she seemed too reserved. The Slytherins were probably out, but a couple of the Hufflepuff girls might work. The problem being that I didn’t know Susan or Hannah all that well. A problem for another time I finally decided. My advanced Transfiguration would have to keep me occupied for the rest of the morning.

Some time later, I heard a knock from downstairs. Closing my book, I hurried down and got there just as my aunt opened the front door.

“Can I help you?” she asked the young brunette in a surprisingly normal looking outfit. What gave her away to me was the huge picnic basket in her hand.

“Hi, I have a delivery for Harry.”

Petunia turned and looked at me. "She's not staying long." Despite the demand, my aunt left for the kitchen.

I waved Tonks in. "Good job on the disguise. You look normal, and nice." I wondered if she were available as I drawled out that last word. Seven years was a stretch at the moment, but it wouldn't be so bad in five years.

Tonks closed the door behind her. "Down, boy," she told me with a grin. "I'm running with a wolf for the moment, but thanks for the compliment. I'll let you know if that changes."

I couldn't stop the blush, but I did have the intelligence to let the subject drop. "So, is that basket for me?" I held my hand out for it.

"Yes, but I'll take it upstairs to your room." She kept the basket and started to move to the stairs.

"You don't have to," I told her, reaching out for the basket again.

A grin told me I had been caught. "Mad-Eye is outside and insists I take it up to your room. He said I should find something interesting there." She resumed her march and I had no good option but to follow. On the other hand, I did notice that when Tonks was in blue jeans, she did have a nice figure. I just had to wonder if that was natural or not. Of course, given that Tonks is a Metamorphmagus, just what does "natural" mean? Did she even know what her "birth form" was any more?

"Harry, what are these for?" She was pointing at the three locks on my door. I guess she hadn't noticed when she was here last summer, or else she had forgotten about them.

"Those were from my second year and how they made sure my freakishness did not contaminate them." My sarcasm was back.

She gave me a penetrating look that promised discomfort to someone, but said nothing. I wondered what the future held for my relatives now. When she opened the door, she made no move to enter my room.

After a very long pause, she finally whispered, "How in the bloody hell did this happen?"

Knowing nothing good could come of this conversation if my aunt walked by, I put my hands on her shoulders and gently pushed Tonks inside, closing the door after myself. "Accidental magic?" I suggested.

Tonks gave me a "snuckle", sort of a snort and chuckle combined. I didn't think it was a raspberry, the context wasn't right and I saw no tongue.

"Really," I insisted. "I was tired of the closet-sized room I had and wished for a bigger room and -- voilà!"

She gave me a "get real" look before she inspected the room. "Harry, this looks just like a Gryffindor dorm room." She lightly ran her hand over the Quidditch poster on the wall, causing several of the players on it to preen and try to get under her hand. "It's so obviously larger than the space allows, anyone could tell magic was involved."

I shrugged. "Doesn't matter. There's a standing rule that only family comes up to the second floor, so my cousin's friends don't see anything. I think you're the first exception since I started Hogwarts."

"Harry, you're avoiding the question. How did this happen?" She fixed me with a stare as if trying to make me answer. Her intimidation factor was nothing compared to Hermione's.

"I told you, I wished for it. Besides, if I had used my wand, don't you think I would have gotten a warning letter?" She nodded at my reasoning. "And, I haven't been taught how to do this in school. Maybe Hermione knows how, but she hasn't told me either." I was going to deny it all.

She set the basket down on my desk. "You have a point, as they don't teach this until seventh year, and I would have heard about any Underage Magic violations." She continued to give me a pointed look, but I ignored it and went to the basket.



“There should be enough in there for several days, but I’ll check on you in two,” Tonks said, dropping the mystery for the moment. “Molly was both appalled and delighted at your predicament,” she said with a grin.

“I can imagine.” I couldn’t help but grin too. Opening it up, I found a note on top and moved it to the side and looked in. Laughing, I said, “There must be enough food in here for two of me for a week.” The inside of the basket was way bigger than the outside.

“I’m sure,” Tonks agreed good-naturedly. “Molly said that she could do this for the rest of the summer, so I’ll bring you a new one every few days. She also said that if you leave the extras in the basket, there is a charm to keep it from spoiling.”

I pulled out a container of Shepherd’s pie and found it still warm. “Want some?”

“Thanks, but I don’t want to take yours as I have some at home.” She fiddled with my curtain for a moment before giving me a serious look. “Harry, please level with me. How did all of this happen?”

“Truthfully, I can’t explain it.” I couldn’t, it would have ruined everything. Also, I have no idea where my power came from either. So it was doubly true. “However, I do plan to enjoy it.”

She nodded, accepting my non-answer, and seemed to be thinking of something else.

“What?” I ask her.

Tonks plopped down on the edge of my bed and looked even more serious as I ate my lunch at the desk. “I’m probably not supposed to tell you this, but I’d be pissed off were I in your position and found out I hadn’t been told as soon as possible.”

That did not sound good. “What?” I asked quietly, forcing myself to not think of all the bad things that might have happened.

“Unless things change, you’re going to have to stay here for the rest of the summer. The Weasleys are at Sirius’s and Dumbledore doesn’t want you to go there.” She looked very pensive, probably expecting an explosion.

I set my food down and searched the basket. It wasn’t hard to find pumpkin juice and a cup. I poured myself a drink while I thought about what she had told me. Truthfully, it wasn’t all that bad given my new living arrangement, except I was getting cabin fever here. Also, I wasn’t sure how much I really wanted to go to Grimmauld Place. I was dealing with Sirius being gone, but there was a part of me that was afraid of what I’d feel if I went back over there.

Shrugging and examining my drink very closely, I said, “I’m mostly OK with that, but it would be nice to see my friends.” That was barely out of my mouth when I remembered Hermione’s last note, saying she was about to leave for the next three weeks with her parents on their summer family holiday trip.

Tonks sighed. “I’m sorry, Harry, but it’s not possible for them to come over here. Dumbledore anticipated that; he’s afraid that would draw too much attention to you.”

That made me angry. “Is he an idiot or what?” I ground out. “My relatives’ address must be on various Ministry records, as Madam Hopkirk could tell you. Or, as long as you know their names, which is also a matter of public record, all anyone has to do is look my uncle up in a phone book and there’s his address.” I thought back to the graveyard at the end of my fourth year. “And besides, I believe Voldemort already knows where I live as he said it was well-protected. So I doubt a few friends coming over would be a security risk.”

She looked shocked. “Then why are you here?”

“Dumbledore said it was because he put up blood wards from my mother.” I wondered about that and thought about looking for them, but I’d have to wait until Moody was gone.

"I'll ask for you," was all she said for a moment. Shuddering, she stood. "Take care, Harry. I'll be in contact in a couple of days and I'll try to bring you more information if I can."

I nodded. "Thanks, Tonks." She still looked down. "Hey, I understand," I told her, trying to cheer her up. "It's not your fault. Life just sucks sometimes."

She gave me a true snort this time. "That's the truth." She patted me on the shoulder and walked out of my room. I followed and let her out of the house.

Back up in my room, I finished my lunch. After cleaning the container with a wandless spell, I saw the note again. Opening it up showed me very legible and flowing script.

Harry,

I guess we shouldn't be surprised at anything those relatives of yours do, but this really takes the cake. (There's a small one of those in the bottom if you search for it.)

Mum is trying to decide if she's going to come over and hex them into next year or if she's going to bust her buttons at the thought of getting to fix you enough food to keep you happy. I'd swear she's part house-elf at times.

So, while she's busy doing food, I'm supposed to be writing you an "everything's OK, keep your chin up" letter. Yeah, right. I know you well enough not to even try that.

Instead, I'll tell you that we're at Snuffles' house again. We're the only ones living here at the moment, with "others" floating in and out. They won't tell us much, but I think things are pretty quiet out there, if you know what I mean.

If you didn't know, Hermione just left for the next three weeks. Ron is also being a real prat. I'm about ready to Bat-bogey him. The point is, you're not missing much. In fact, I'd happily trade places with you for some peace and quiet, but we've already asked about coming over

and were told “No” so loudly Ron’s head spun, or at least it did in my imagination.

Mum is almost done so I better wrap this up. Take care. I’ll try to write more next time.

Ginny

I slowly folded that up and set it down. Then I picked it back up and read it again. Putting it back down again, I walked over and plopped into my transfigured recliner. Why hadn’t I ever thought about Ginny? Of course, when thinking of girls a year younger, there was also Luna. Luna was fun in her own way and I was glad she was my friend, but dating her wouldn’t be right, at least for my brain. My sense of humor would love it, though.

Why not Ginny? She was cute and turning pretty as she got older. Having spent time with her last year, I knew she was funny, a real wicked sense of humor. Ginny was also pretty smart and a great Quidditch player. In fact, I thought she was better than Ron, but it probably wouldn’t be a good idea to tell him that.

Then a memory came to me. On the train home several weeks ago, she talked about choosing Dean. She had been vague-sounding, as if she was only trying out the idea, but what if she was serious? I couldn’t move in on another guy; it just wouldn’t be right. But what if she was just tweaking Ron and so she was free? I contemplated Ron’s little sister who wasn’t so “little” any more, one who used to have a crush on me, but seemed pretty normal around me last year. We’d even had several really nice conversations and she had helped me get around Umbridge to talk to Sirius.

It took me nearly an hour of going back and forth in my mind, but I finally realized there were only two ways out of this and I was tired of being a coward about girls -- plus I was a Gryffindor. I had all the magical power I needed, so there was no reason to be afraid of the girl. Getting up, I went over to my desk and started writing a letter.

Dear Ginny,

Please tell your mother thanks and give her a hug for me. I really appreciate the food and she is one of the best cooks I know. As soon as I finish this letter, I plan to search for that cake.

I also thank you for the news. It sounds like you don't know much more than I do, but I thank you anyway. At least you tried, which is a lot more than I can say for some prats.

I also have a question for you. This may make it my turn to be a prat, but I hope you'll forgive me for being so forward. Perhaps if I was there and could do this in person, it would come out a lot better.

I know you used to like me, but I also know that you seemed to have moved on. Hermione told me you gave up on me. You also mentioned choosing Dean on the train ride home, so maybe you're not free anyway, but I was wondering if you had any interest in dating me, assuming you are free.

Please write back and let me know. If you're interested, I'm interested too.

Harry

Perhaps that could have been better, but magic couldn't do everything. I looked around and saw Hedwig sitting on the window sill watching me. When we made eye contact, she flew over. I've got a smart owl.

"Take this to Ginny Weasley. She's at Sirius's old house where we stayed last summer." Hedwig hooted. "Be safe and you can wait there for a reply. I won't have any other letters in the meantime." Hedwig rubbed her head against my hand and then launched into flight.

With the rest of the afternoon free, I decided to take Tonks's suggestion -- literally. Transfiguring some old boxers into real swim trunks, I headed out to the back garden with a towel. A cold drink, a large piece of chocolate cake, and a Charms book also went along to keep me company. After stretching out on the towel, I realize this really was a nice day.

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At the end of a surprisingly nice day, despite that my aunt told me that morning they didn't plan to feed me any more for the summer, I lay down to go to sleep. I had only been in bed for a few minutes when Hedwig came winging her way in. She was so silent I never would have known she had come back if she hadn't landed on my chest. Since she didn't normally do that, I wondered what Ginny had told my owl.

"That was fast," I told her while I petted her.

She gave a short barking hoot, which might have meant, "Of course," but then again, I don't speak owl. She stuck her leg out and I relieved her of her letter. Conjuring a floating light, I summoned an owl treat from across the room and gave it to her for the good job. I opened the letter to read it. I will admit to being very curious and even hopeful.

Dear Harry,

I was very surprised to get your letter. Not only was it fast in returning, but you've never written me before. Don't get me wrong, it was a pleasant surprise.

You should also know that you have amazing timing, just like on the Quidditch pitch. Ask me about this letter sometime when it's just the two of us alone.

I should probably tell you up front that I'm really sorry I ever told Hermione that I gave up on you and I'm starting to think that you took that far differently than I really meant it. I now suspect that you thought I meant that I was completely over you and you were just another boy. Am I right? However, nothing could be further from the truth. What I really meant was that I gave up on my crush. Being around you allowed me to get to know the real Harry and I found I genuinely liked him. So you could say that I'm interested in you too.

You'll be pleased to know that I am free at the moment, no boyfriends, despite what my prat of a brother may think. However, I am very open

to having a boyfriend, especially one who is willing to be with the real me.

In some ways, it would be a lot easier to do this in person, and yet, this is easier in other ways. Here, I can write what I really think and not let my blush get in the way and make me all shy and tongue-tied.

I'm afraid we're restricted to letters for the rest of the summer. I wished that wasn't true, but I guess we'll have to wait until the train to hold hands or do the other boy/girl things. I hope you don't mind that I'm really looking forward to that.

Please write soon,  
Your Ginny

p.s. Even though Mum will still be the one cooking, I'm now in charge of putting your basket together, so I'll put my letters in there for you. You can send yours back in the empty basket.

p.p.s. I've also been told to tell you that Mum is happy for your thank you note, but that you must not send Hedwig over here any more. They think she's too conspicuous and well-known. Personally, I'd rather have you over here, but that's not possible either, I'm told.

I was figuratively bouncing off the walls at that point. I wanted to shout, "I've got a girlfriend," over and over like some little kid. I guess that shows I'm not totally grown up yet. The goofy grin all over my face would not help my case for being grown up, either.

Extinguishing the light, I lie back down and try to go to sleep. That is far harder now than it was a few minutes ago. Visions of a cute little redhead and what I'd like to do with her are running through my head. I'm not ever telling anyone I fell asleep hugging my pillow while thinking of my brand new girlfriend ... uh-uh, no way.

I'm still over the moon about Ginny the next morning. The fact that my normal two friends are ignoring me and not being true friends by writing meaningful letters is no longer important. I'm sure that when I

explain it to them, they'll be sorry, apologize, and then we can go back to being friends -- at least, I hope so.

As I'm eating breakfast, I see a slim book on my desk that looks useful -- one of many I had purchased the other day. Pulling it out of the stack and flipping through it, I start to mentally digest what's in it. It takes me awhile to figure out the theory, but before lunchtime, the three D's of Apparation make sense, as does the idea of what I must do to Apparate. Engaging my "magic vision", I look out the window and see a glowing prone lump out behind the bushes at the end of the driveway. It's Fletcher again, so I can do anything without worry.

With my own special brand of determination, I head out to the back garden, book in hand. After one last review, I put the book down and think about a spot on the other side of the garden. With everything in mind, plus a vision of my self opening up a tunnel through space to travel through and then safely land over there, I push my magic as if I'm doing a spell.

Of course, I can't be normal with this either. I've seen adults Apparate and I don't recall them being sucked upwards as if going into a funnel. I felt like I was moving very fast and my body was very fluid, almost like going through a pipe. The sensation was very brief as I was just as suddenly dropped back down onto my feet, as if stepping off of a short step a few inches high. I was amazed I didn't fall over like with a Portkey and it didn't hurt. There was also no "yanking" or "pulling" feelings. Hoping and praying that it had worked correctly, I patted myself down and looked across the yard. I saw no parts over there and it felt like I was all still here and correctly put together. I had successfully Apparated, or whatever I did. I wondered how loud I was, but I could think of no way to figure that out.

Just for fun, I did it back to the other side of the yard, and it worked again. Thinking about the park a few blocks away, I went there, successfully. Feeling confident, I popped to the Apparation point in Diagon Alley, then to the Shrieking Shack, and finally back home and straight into my bedroom. Best as I could tell, I wasn't even missing a hair. This was brilliant! I shouted and danced in the privacy of my room. It was a good thing no one else was home.



With joy and cockiness that I felt was well deserved, I wrote Ginny a letter. At the bottom, I told her to go visit Buckbeak at nine that evening, well it would be tomorrow evening, and to make sure she was alone. I'd send it to her via the empty basket tomorrow.

Damn! It's good to be me and have a lot of power!

Tonks had taken the empty basket and my letter this morning. I had then spent all day trying to keep busy by reading and doing little things. It was tough. My best way to keep from looking at the clock every two minutes had been to start working on understanding brooms and trying to put my hobby one together. While I was doing that, I only looked at the clock about every half hour. Man, I'm so pitiful.

When nine o'clock rolled around that evening, I had my best pair of jeans on along with a nice green shirt that matched my eyes. I tried to fix my hair, but apparently it had a magic of its own and wouldn't stay down no matter what I did to it. I suppose I could do nothing with it because it was like fighting myself.

Now that I was about to leave, I became very nervous. What if she really doesn't like me and she was just being nice? That was silly, I decided. Ginny isn't the type to mess people around. If she wasn't alone right now, that would be a real problem, but there wasn't much I could do about that. Then I grinned ... actually, there was something I could do. I grabbed my Invisibility Cloak and put it on.

Ready for the second time, and it was only two minutes after nine, I thought very carefully about the attic at number twelve Grimmauld Place and willed myself there. Again, I was sucked up and felt like I was "flowing". A couple of seconds later, I was deposited at my destination, right beside the door. I must have made a noise because Buckbeak, who was at the other end of the long room, became uneasy and was looking around.

Looking around for myself, I see that Ginny is leaning against the wall not far away and it's just her and the hippogriff in the room. With a grin, I pull my cloak down so I was the famous floating head. "Ginny..."

Her head whipped around and she stumbled for a second. "Harry?" Then her eyes lit up. "Harry!" She ran to me and threw her arms around me. Before I realized what was happening, her face was on mine and we were kissing.

I've only ever really kissed one girl, Cho Chang, and it was only one time, and it wasn't all that great. However, I have to say, Ginny was incredible. Before I knew it, I had been pushed a half step backward and was pressed against the wall and she was pressed against me, lips and body. There was absolutely nothing to complain about. I did my best to match her and enjoy it all.

Eventually, I had to come up for air and so I pushed her back just slightly. I had that goofy grin back while I looked at her. She had similar look on her face.

"How did you get here?" she asked.

I casually waved my hand behind her back in the direction of the door. I wanted to make sure that anything we said did not get overheard. A second quick wave put up a charm to tell me if anyone came within ten feet of the door.

"Would you believe magic?" One of her hands lightly popped me on the side of the head. "I guess not." I was still grinning, along with enjoying feeling her body pressed against mine. "I Apparated or something like it."

She lost her grin. "But you shouldn't have had those classes yet and the wards of the house should prevent that." My body wanted to protest when she backed away and pulled her wand on me. With a calculating look, she asked, "Prove you're really Harry."

I couldn't help but chuckle. "Shouldn't you have asked me that before you tried to snog my tonsils out?"

She blushed. "Yeah, but at least I'm recovering from my mistake." She wiggled her wand at me. "Again, prove you're Harry."

“Uh, last year, you helped me break into the Umbridge’s office to Floo call Sirius. You also went to the Department of Mysteries where you got a broken ankle. I could also tell you about your first year and how Fawkes carried us out of the hole in a bathroom, but I suspect neither of us really wants to talk about that year.”

Her arm had started dropping after my first statement. She dropped her wand by the time I finished.

I pulled the cloak completely off and dropped it on the floor. “I’m sorry I brought that up.” I opened my arms wide and she came over. We hugged for several minutes and just held each other. “I’m sorry,” I told her again.

She shook her head, her forehead moving on my chin. “No, it wasn’t your fault and that was probably the best proof you could have given me.”

I rubbed her back and she seemed to enjoy that and snuggled into me a little more. If she had been a cat I would have bet she would be purring right now. I enjoyed holding her and slowing breathing in the scent of her shampoo. It reminded me of watermelon.

“So, you learned to Apparate?”

“Yeah. In fact, I can do a lot of things now that I couldn’t before this summer. I have a lot to tell you.”

She looked up at me and slowly smiled. “I’d like to hear it all, but I can’t really stay up here too long.”

“I can come over every night,” I suggested.

“And I’d like that.” She pushed up a little and kissed me gently.

“Yeah, I’d like that too,” I said breathlessly. She chuckled. “Do you have your bedroom alone for the moment?”

“Since Hermione is gone, yeah. Why?”

"I can put my cloak on and go down with you. Tell whoever you're going to bed early and we can quietly talk for a few hours. Unless you have something to do early in the morning, I can stay as late as you want. I have nothing special to do tomorrow."

Ginny quickly kissed me again. "Sounds like a great plan. Put your cloak on." She bent down and picked her wand and my cloak up. I couldn't help but watch that motion, enjoying it thoroughly before taking my cloak back.

I became invisible again and took my charms down. A minute later, I was in her bedroom and she told me she'd be back very soon. It took her nearly five minutes, but she returned and closed her door.

"Sorry, I can't lock it, so you should probably keep your cloak on," she suggested.

"Let me put a charm on the door so I know if anyone comes near." I waved my hand in that direction and she gasped.

"Your hand turned blue for a second."

I grinned at her. "That's what I want to tell you about. Let me silence the room so no one can hear us." I did another spell before taking up a seat beside her on her bed, both of us leaning against the wall.

"How are you doing that, and aren't you afraid you'll get into trouble?" she asked curiously.

"Nope," I told her confidently, "especially not here. This house is Unplottable so even you could do all the magic you wanted and not get into trouble. I just recently learned that."

She slowly looked up and I could see her getting angry. "I'm going to hurt my mother..."

"Hey, either she didn't know or she did it just to keep you busy."

"You're not helping, Harry," she growled, a sound that I kind of liked now that she was my girlfriend.

“Oh, right. Sorry. Well, I guess I should explain about me.” I launched into the story of my summer. I told her about the lightning hitting me and the power boost. I also told her about all the magical stuff I’d been doing around the house with nary an owl from the Ministry. I also talked about all the stuff I’d been learning and doing. It took me well over an hour and many questions from her, but we had a good time.

She also told me about her summer, and she was right in her letter, it was not much to speak of. Unlike Ron, she had already finished her summer homework.

“Oh, I was supposed to ask you about the timing of my letter.”

Ginny laughed lightly. “Be glad you wrote when you did, Harry. I was waiting on Errol to come back from another trip so he could take a letter to Dean. I had been messing with Ron’s mind when I told him about Dean on the train, but then I decided that he was a pretty decent bloke, so I had written him to see if he was still interested in me. He had indicated he was at the end of last year. However, after I read your letter, I tore up my letter to Dean. There was no need to see about his interest in me when I had the man of my dreams asking me to be his girlfriend,” she finished with a smile.

I kissed her. “Good decision.”

She chuckled. “Harry, just so you don’t get too mad at Ron, or at Hermione either, they were both told not to write you about anything of importance or about the Order. Of course, I wasn’t told that and I thought it silly as well.”

I kissed her again. “Another good decision.”

Coyly licking her lips, she said, “Maybe you need to give me some more incentives to keep telling you things.”

I eagerly agreed. After a little kissing, we arranged a meeting time before I left. She was watching me when I went home. I’ll have to remember to ask her what it looks like when I see her tomorrow night.

This summer is turning out more brilliant all the time.

The next few weeks were smashing. I'd read, work on my custom broom, or simply have fun with magic in the daytime. Then in the evening, I'd go visit Ginny, usually in her room or in the attic of number twelve Grimmauld. A few times, I'd even wear my Cloak into the main part of the house and visit the library there to pull out a few special tomes.

Ginny informed me that her mother had pulled some of the "Darker" works out in an attempt to protect her and her brothers. That incensed me a little because those books were rightfully mine. So carefully reaching out with my magic, I sought out all the books in the house that were part of the Black Estate, establishing a magical connection to follow. That exercise led me to what Ginny told me was her mother and father's room. Since her parents were down in the kitchen, I went in and found the books in their closet. Pulling them out, I took them back to the library where they belonged and then I searched Magic and found the spell I needed and cast it on the room.

"What did you do?" she asked me.

"I put a ward on the room and the books in it. Try to take a book out of the room," I innocently suggested, working hard to keep a grin off my face.

She looked at me questioningly for a moment, obviously trying to divine what I was doing, but she eventually gave up and pulled a book off the shelf and tried to walk out ... try being the operative word. As she reached the doorway, most of her kept going, but the book would not go past the threshold. She walked one step back and then tried again with the same result. With a grin on her face, she put the book back on the shelf.

"I'm the only one who can take books out now," I said with a grin.

"That is going to drive Hermione crazy when she comes over," she chuckled.

“What about your Mum when she finds those evil books have come back?” I teased.

Ginny snuckled. “That will be fun too.”

“Be sure to tell her that the books and everything else in the house are mine and nothing may be disposed of without my permission.”

“OK.” Ginny looked thoughtful for a moment. “Can you cast the same spell on the house as a whole?”

I considered that. “Maybe. It’s harder on large areas or where the items aren’t well defined. For example, should it affect a sandwich that your Mum makes and gives to your Dad to take to work for lunch?”

She nodded. “I see your point, but I’ve heard that Fletcher was trying to take some of the silver,” she said a little hesitantly. “Moody caught him and made him put it back.”

That was upsetting. I might have to go track the little bugger down. But for the immediate problem, there was an easier way to keep things inside. Again querying Magic, a few seconds later I had the answer. Walking over to a wall, I put my hand on it and cast a spell. With a huge grin, I turned back to Ginny.

“What did you do?”

Through my grin I said, “Made it so Fletcher can’t come back into the house.”

Ginny’s eyes went wide before her hand flew to mouth. She bent over and stumbled a little before she fell into a chair. Muffled laughter came out as did tears of levity. “Oh, Merlin, you don’t know how much trouble that’s going to cause.”

“I can guess.” Then a truly wicked thought came to me. I turned back to the wall and cast the charm again.

“And that one?” she asked, looking ready to laugh again based on her easy grin.

“I think Snape will have a hard time returning as well.”

Ginny lost it again and burst out laughing. Unfortunately, there was a problem this time. Her laughter brought unwanted attention. I heard the footsteps just in time to pull my Invisibility Cloak up.

Ron walked into the room and stared at his sister. “What are you laughing about?” he asked a little sourly. Ginny had told me that he had been in a funk and was not happy to be cooped up in the house, a feeling I understood all too well. It seemed the “adults in charge” did not understand, as this problem kept coming up: Sirius, me, and now the Weasley children.

When she noticed him, she quickly looked around. She looked relieved to not see me, but I was curious as to what she’d say.

“I was trying to work out a prank for the twins and I guess the thought of it was just too much,” she blithely put forth.

“What were you thinking?” Ron asked, clearly intrigued.

“The thought of sticking them together, preferably lips to lips.”

I wondered how long she had been thinking of that. It wasn’t too bad of an idea.

Ron snorted. “Right; I don’t think you can pull it off.”

“Probably not,” Ginny sighed, “but it did strike me as really funny, especially the visual.”

Then my lovely girlfriend did one of the either sweetest or meanest things I’ve ever seen. It was really difficult to decide which.

“Ron, are you going to apologize to Harry when you see him next?”



Her brother froze with a “hand caught in the biscuit jar” look. “For ... what?” he asked slowly.

I got the impression that he knew, but didn't want to admit it. There were times I wondered why I considered him my best mate.

“For not being a friend to him this summer. For not really writing to him. For not really fighting to get him here with us.”

I had to hand it to Ginny; she didn't pull any punches. But that was one of the reasons I liked her. She rarely beat around the bush and almost always told you exactly what she thought. I didn't like people who played games with me; I'd had too much of that in my short life.

Ron took a few deep breaths and stared at the ceiling for a moment. “Do you think he'll understand if I tell him that it's because Hermione promised Dumbledore and made me do so too?”

A wry grin came over Ginny. “Oh, I think he'll understand that part; Harry believes in keeping promises. What I don't think he'll understand is why you made the promise to do everything Dumbledore asked. You knew Harry wouldn't like it, and yet you promised anyway. Harry wouldn't have promised to do that for you. He would have told Dumbledore to forget about it or some vague answer, and then he would have written you and told you what you wanted to know anyway.”

Damn! She knew me so well. I like her more and more each day.

Ron decided the floor was interesting now. “I suppose you're right,” he finally said.

“Go think about that Ron. A sincere apology will help you a lot. You should also plan on having this same talk with Hermione. You know how she obsesses over following rules, and yet this is one she should have broken,” Ginny stated pointedly.

“You're probably right about that, too,” he said dejectedly before he turned around and left.

In some ways I felt sorry for him, but it was his bad decision. Hearing his side didn't make me feel any better, either.

When Ron was gone, I dropped the hood of my Invisibility Cloak. "You're the best girlfriend ever," I whispered in her ear.

Ginny sighed contentedly and leaned back into my arms, her back against my front.

As much as I didn't want to say it, I said, "I probably should go now."

She turned around. "Probably." Her agreement didn't stop her from grabbing my face with both hands and snogging me silly.

With a goofy grin, I told her, "I'll see you tomorrow night," before I left.

Back in my bedroom, I flopped down on my bed and let my own sigh out. "Merlin I love that girl." It hit me what I'd actually said, which jerked my thoughts out of la-la land. Did I really love her? Did I even know what love was? I decided that I wasn't sure what love was, at least not at the moment, but if I did love anyone, Ginny would probably be the first.

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One interesting side-effect of my many short visits to Grimmauld Place was that it helped me to get over losing Sirius sooner. The thought of him still left me with a bit of sadness, but by taking it in small doses and with Ginny present to help keep my moods from getting too bad, I think I recovered faster than I would have otherwise.

I saw Ron a couple of more times for a few minutes each and he seemed pretty moody. I think his tangle with those brain things in the Department of Mysteries must have done something to him. It wasn't too bad, but it was enough to be noticed. I decided I wouldn't be quite as hard on him, but I did still expect an apology about the letters.

The second week in August changed things for us dramatically. First, I was able to put a very nice present wrapped in colorful wrapping paper in one of my return baskets. I had to do that because I was

supposedly unable to see Ginny, so how else was I to get her birthday present to her. Secondly, Hermione returned from her holiday with her family and came to stay at Grimmauld Place.

I went to Grimmauld Place late on the eleventh and met Ginny in the attic. She was very happy to see me and thanked me profusely with her lips for her present. I was just as happy to receive her thanks. I admired her choker with a ruby lion on it. It looked beautiful on her, or maybe I should say I think it enhanced her beauty.

"That looks better on you than it did in the store," I told her as we parted from our kiss.

She sort of growled and moaned before giving me another kiss. "I think it's spectacular, despite what my mother thinks."

"Oh?" I couldn't imagine why her mother wouldn't like it. The pendant on it looked very tasteful and like it probably was expensive, which it was. I'd gone out one morning a few days ago and bought it in a Muggle jewelry store.

Ginny chuckled. "Yeah, she recognizes that it wasn't cheap, which makes her wonder why you spent so much on me when she thinks that all we are are casual friends. Also, she's never liked chokers as she thinks only loose women wear them." She gave me a quick kiss. "But don't you worry, I like it."

I kissed her throat around the choker. She responded by clinging even tighter to me as she threw her head back to give me access. "You are so amazing."

The throaty growl was back. "You're wonderful too, but I can't stay too long."

"Why not?" I murmur as I move up, planting a kiss near her ear.

"Because Hermione is going to be suspicious if I'm gone too long. As much as I hate to say it, your visits are going to have to be short and random." Apparently unable to take what I was doing to her any more,

she reached up grabbed my head and snogged the life out of me for a long moment.

When I could talk again, I said, "I could just appear on the doorstep and say I was here for the rest of the summer."

She snuckled. "Do you know how many questions and problems that would raise? I'm sure they'd find out about your magic then and you said you didn't want that. Of course, I like watching your blue aura and the blue fire run over your skin. I think it's..." She blushed prettily. "Well, let's just say that I really like it."

I wasn't quite sure what she had intended to say or how to take that, but I decided it was a positive comment and went on. "I said I wanted to delay their knowing, but they will find out one day. I mean, I am going to have to take care of Volde-wart sometime soon. Since nothing is happening, I'm not too worried, but when he starts things, I'm going to have to finish him off once and for all." I had told her about the prophecy just after my birthday. I was actually impressed at how calmly she had accepted it, but that was probably due to my recent power increase so she wasn't as worried.

"Still, I think you should wait until you get back to school. That will cause fewer problems, or at least you'll have to deal with fewer people who want to control you."

We had talked about what might happen when my new power was known. The only question we had was who would pitch the biggest fit: Dumbledore, Fudge, or her mother.

"You have a point," I agreed. "And it is only for the next three weeks. Once we get past that, we can easily have the next ten months together."

She pressed me against the wall and slid up a few inches to kiss me again. "I'd like to have a lot longer than ten months, Harry," she breathlessly told me.

Between her body, her smoldering look, and the way she talked to me, I knew I was a goner. Ten months was now irrelevant. I wanted

her forever. Of course, I might have been thinking with my hormones at the moment, but my hormones were really happy and wanted to be that happy again as often as possible.

"You can have as long as you want," I told her as I crushed her back to me and snogged her.

Considering how occupied we were with each other at that moment, I'm very surprised I even noticed my proximity alarm going off. Knowing I had no hope of hiding before whoever it was at the door opened said door, I continued to hold on tightly to Ginny and transported us back to my room. I felt squeezed a little tighter with both of us going at once, but otherwise, it was a normal transportation -- to me. Ginny had a different opinion.

When we fell the last couple of inches to the floor, she looked up at me in terror. "What just happened and where are we?"

"Shush," I tried to calm her. "Someone was about to walk in and I brought us back to my place." She nodded in understanding and started to calm, but I could tell she wasn't comfortable with it. "Did it hurt you in any way?"

That seemed to stop more of her worry as she took stock of how she felt. "No. I'm fine, it's just that ... I guess I wasn't expecting that. It didn't hurt at all, I suppose I was just really surprised."

"You're fine then," I gently reassured her. "We'll stay here for a few minutes and then I'll get my cloak and we can go back." I had stopped using my cloak when I came over after the first week, unless I had planned to go out of the attic. I was stupid for not doing so now that Hermione was in the house. She tended to investigate everything.

"Do you really think we can sneak back? I mean, your method of travel is really unusual."

I smiled and raised my hand to brush a few errant hairs out of her face. She leaned into my hand and then hugged me. I comforted her and let her calm the rest of the way, knowing her question was really rhetorical given how powerful I was now.

When I had returned the day after my first visit to Grimmauld Place, Ginny had watched my arrival. She had explained that instead of just appearing, like her parents did when they Apparated, I appeared feet first, like I was falling out of the air. She said it was like there was a line just over where my head should be and my whole body quickly moved down with my feet appearing first and going down, until my head appeared last. I suppose it would be like coming down on a lift, except that it happened in the blink of an eye. She also said that when I left, it was the opposite, like there was an artificial ceiling just above my head and I went up into it extremely quickly. I was also totally silent. Better yet, she knew there were Anti-Apparation wards on Grimmauld Place and I went right through them. So my method of travel was not really Apparation, but something better.

Ginny took a few minutes to look around my room. "It's like our dorm room. You did a good job, Harry."

"Thanks. The real room is about a quarter of this size."

She looked surprised. "You did Room Expansion wandlessly?" She looked really impressed.

I nodded. "I think it's time to return. We can go to Sirius's room. I remember where it is and I don't expect anyone to be there." I retrieved my Invisibility Cloak and wrapped it around both of us before I took us to Sirius's room. It was indeed empty of people. I was also hit with the biggest wave of loss yet since I had left school for the summer.

Ginny must have recognized it or expected it, because she gave me a hug to end all hugs. "It's all right, Harry." She gave me a short soft kiss and that helped to ground me. I saw a lot of caring in her brown eyes and I was again glad that I had chosen her as a girlfriend. The idea of a future with her was sounding better and better.

I gently kissed her back. "Thanks." I noticed a small mirror on the desk there and recognized it immediately, since I had once had its mate. That memory didn't help my feelings, but the mirror also gave me an idea. I quickly grabbed it and put it in my pocket for later.

I led her over to the door and listened carefully. Neither of us heard anyone out in the hallway. I opened the door and let her slip out. Before she could close the door, we both heard one of the voices we really didn't want to hear.

"Ginny? What were you doing in there?"

"Oh hi, Hermione. Nothing much, I just wanted to see what it was like. It's one of the few rooms I haven't explored yet. I didn't think Harry would mind."

Again I was impressed with her ability to make up stuff that made sense. She was definitely the sister of Fred and George.

"Why does it matter what Harry thinks? I mean," she hastily added, "I know Sirius was his godfather, but you make it sound like you need his permission."

"In a way, we all need his permission to be here. You do realize this is his house now, don't you?"

Looking through the crack of the door, I could see them both. Hermione was giving the question some real thought, apparently never realizing that I might be Sirius's heir.

"You think Harry inherited this?"

Ginny grinned. "Actually, I know he did because he told me so in a letter." A small stretch as I told her in person, but I had told her.

Hermione considered that. A quizzical look came over her. "Do you think that's why I can't take library books out of the library any more? When I tried this morning, the book wouldn't leave the room. I could take books out when Sirius was still alive." Hermione looked put out and I immediately wished I could have been there this morning when she tried to remove a book. Her struggle and reaction must have been hilarious to watch.

Ginny shrugged. "One could guess that is the normal way the house works and that Sirius overrode it, so when he died, the normal behavior returned."

Hermione worried her lower lip. "That would be pretty sophisticated magic, but I suppose that could happen."

Ginny had impressed me again.

"Do you know what Harry got on his OWLs? Did he tell you in one of his letters?"

"No, actually he hasn't told me. I'll have to ask."

I really hadn't told her because it didn't seem important when I got them a week ago. I had sent my sixth year choices to McGonagall with Hedwig and then tossed the results in my trunk, forgetting about them. I had done a little better than I had expected, but they were not brilliant by any means. Too bad I didn't have my power boost before I took my OWLs.

"Do you think I could put a letter in with yours?" Hermione asked, and she sounded very sincere.

"Sure. I just sent a basket over this morning, so it will be day after tomorrow before I send the next."

"Thanks." Hermione suddenly looked very unsure of herself, a look I didn't see on her very often. "Will you come help me write it? I got to thinking during my trip that I haven't treated Harry very well this summer, and well, you seem a lot closer to him right now than any of the rest of us. You're acting like you're his best friend and know what he's thinking now."

That admission surprised me, but then again, Hermione had supported me during our fourth year and Ron hadn't. So I really shouldn't have been surprised that Hermione had picked up on the problem with the letters before Ron.

"Sure." Ginny sounded happy to help.



“Ginny? I know I’ve only been here for a day, but you seem really happy compared to everyone else. Have you and Harry, you know...” Hermione was waving her hands, trying to imply whatever she hadn’t wanted to say.

I found it amusing.

“Have we what?” Ginny asked innocently.

My girlfriend was enjoying this far too much; and well, I was too, in a way.

After a moment, Hermione shook her head. “Never mind, it’s not important. Will you come help me with my letter?”

“Yeah, let me close this door first.” Ginny came back to the door and stood right next to it for a second.

“Here, tomorrow night,” I whispered very softly.

She nodded ever so slightly as she closed the door.

I planned to have a surprise for her, so I left and went straight to the alley behind the grocery store not far from my house. Taking off my cloak, I went inside. Fortunately for me, they carried more than just food and so it didn’t take me long to find two small mirrors on the hair care aisle. A little less than ten quid later, they were mine and I went back to the alley to travel home.

In the morning, I would study Sirius’s mirror to learn the charm or charms needed to link two mirrors for communication and then I would make another pair. Once I gave one of them to Ginny tomorrow night, it would be easy to coordinate where and when to meet without popping into a room where someone else already was.

The rest of the summer looked very promising, romance-wise.

A/N: That’s pretty much the summer. Next we have Harry’s return to school, and what a return it is.

## Chapter 2 - Vanquishing

On the morning of the first of September, I got up early to take care of various things that needed to be done before I went to school. I thought it strange that the Order hadn't told me how they were going to take me to the train station, but I was glad because that meant I could spend the time as I chose.

I had already visited Diagon Alley in disguise and purchased my school supplies. I told Ginny in a letter that I had owl-ordered them, to make the Order think I had been a good boy and hadn't left my aunt's house. According to Ginny, that still made them upset because Dumbledore didn't want Hedwig to be seen, but he couldn't do much about it once it had been done, or how they had thought it was done. My deception was holding.

I carefully searched my room and made sure I had everything of mine in my new trunk. Well, it was my old trunk, but it was changed. Remembering Moody's seven-compartment trunk, I had expanded the inside of my trunk with the help of information from some of the extra books I'd purchased and made my own three-compartment trunk. I had also installed some security on it, so no one but me would be opening it. I had plenty of space for all of my things now. Ready to go, I shrunk my trunk and put it in my pocket. Fortunately, the weight decreased as well.

After a quick breakfast, I shrunk the last food basket and gave it to Hedwig to take to Mrs Weasley at Grimmauld Place before she flew on to Hogwarts. I knew she'd be happier flying there than traveling with me.

I wasn't feeling overly charitable, so I Vanished everything left in the room. Most of the old furniture had been about to fall apart before I transfigured it into something useful, so I was probably doing them a favor. When I was ready to leave, my room and closet were back to their normal size and both were completely bare. Part of me wished I had nostalgic thoughts about leaving this place, but I'd be lying to myself if I thought that. I'm glad to be leaving this place.

Going downstairs, I found Aunt Petunia. It almost appeared she was waiting for me. Fortunately for them, Vernon and Dudley were gone. I believe my uncle had taken my cousin back to Smeltings early that morning, but it really didn't matter to me as long as they weren't here to get themselves into trouble. If they bothered me now, I would not hesitate to knock them through a wall.

"Aunt Petunia, I'm off and, well, I'm never coming back. So, this is good-bye." She looked to be enjoying this time about as much as I was.

"As you wish." She sounded like she really didn't care if I came back or not. "I thought your Professor wanted you to return next summer too."

I snuckled. "He's free to want that, but I don't plan to. I only stayed here this summer because I wasn't sure where to go and it was more convenient for me. I'll spend time during the school year and Christmas searching for a flat or something. I can do all the magic I want now, so it won't be a problem."

She looked like she was about to argue, but didn't. Instead, all she said was, "Good-bye, Harry."

There was a part of me wanted to tell her off for everything they had done to me, but I knew it wouldn't matter a single whit, so I didn't bother wasting the energy. However, there was one last thing to do. "I need to go to the back garden to remove the reason Dumbledore sends me back here each summer, it won't take but a moment. Good-bye, Aunt Petunia." I turned and walked out the back door. There was no real love lost between us.

I had found the ward stone Dumbledore had used to erect his fabled blood protection wards weeks ago during one of Dung's shifts. There was some magic there that I didn't understand, so I assumed that was what I was looking for. I figured that if I destroyed the stone, that would ensure that even Dumbledore would admit that I'd have no reason to return. Calling magic to my hands, which caused them to glow blue, I pulled the stone up out of the earth. (Dumbledore had buried it to hide it.) With a push of my magic, I shattered it into bits of

gravel. There was a backlash of energy, but I contained it. I Vanished the pieces of stone and then filled in the hole, making it looking like nothing had happened. I suspected whatever monitor Dumbledore had on the wards here was probably going off now, assuming he was in his office to hear it. I didn't wait around to find out; instead, I traveled to Diagon Alley, appearing right in front of Gringotts. The idea of travelling on my own made me wonder again if I was upsetting plans by taking myself. The prankster part of me really hoped I was.

"Hey!" I heard and turned around. Who should I see but Auror Dawlish, the "slow one" from Dumbledore's office last year. This could be fun.

"Yes?" I ask, as if I don't have any idea what's wrong. Actually, I have a pretty good idea, but the Auror doesn't know what he's getting himself into.

"Hey, you're Harry Potter," he suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh? What makes you say that?" I really couldn't help myself. It was so fun "playing" with clueless people.

"Your scar. And you're not seventeen yet so you're Apparating without a license. You're going to have to come to the Ministry with me." He started walking towards me, to grab my arm to take me in, I assume.

"Hold on just a moment, Auror. Are there Anti-Apparation wards in this area?" I knew there were; I could feel them when I tried.

"Well ... yes," he finally admitted.

"In that case, I couldn't have been Apparating." Now I spoke very slowly as to a child so he wouldn't miss my point. "And because I wasn't Apparating, I didn't break the law."

"But, but there's no other way for you to travel here."

I could clearly see him trying to puzzle this out. I'm surprised he didn't mention Portkeys; I guess he felt I was too young to figure those out.

“Please don’t forget that we live in a world of magic, so it’s quite possible I used a method you’re unaware of, and therefore, it’s not regulated or against the law. Have a good day.” I left him mouth agape and walked the half dozen steps into the bank. I’m really surprised he didn’t cast a spell at me, but I am thankful as I really didn’t want a spell-fight here. Dealing with a magical battle would have put me off of my schedule. I know that I’m safe inside the bank. Throwing magic around in the Goblin premises was unhealthy as the burly Goblin security guards frowned on that sort of thing.

Inside, I walk up to a clerk. “I need to make a withdrawal and I don’t wish to take the time to go down to my vault. Can you give me the money and charge it to my vault?”

The goblin looked up at me and gave me a feral look. “Five Galleon charge, Wizard.” The challenge was obvious.

That seemed a bit steep, but the cart rides took longer than I had. “Please charge five hundred and five Galleons to this vault.” I handed my key over. “The extra five is for the withdrawal fee.”

While the goblin was getting my money, I had a few other thoughts. After he put a money bag in front of me, I ask, “I don’t believe I’ve ever received any statements about my account, or any of my accounts really.” I was making this up as I didn’t know what I had, but I was a Gryffindor and the courage to do stupid things was in me. “Besides my personal vault that belongs to that key, I’d like the statements for it and my family vault for the last fifteen years.” No one has ever said there was a Potter family vault, but supposedly, the Potters were an old and noble family as well. The Blacks had had a family vault, so why wouldn’t the Potters too?

“That will be fifteen Galleons per vault and they will not be ready until after this time tomorrow,” the goblin told me.

“Are there just the two vaults?” I ask. Hey, there could be more for all I knew.

“Yes, just the two,” he confirmed in a surly voice.

“Right. Hmm, I won’t be available tomorrow. Can you owl them to me?”

“That will be another two Galleon charge,” he said and seemed to enjoy it.

Greedy bastards, I thought. “Fine,” I snapped. I dug into my money bag and put thirty-two gold coins down. I would have told him to take it from my personal vault, but he might have added a five Galleon fee for all I knew. “Send them to me at Hogwarts. One last thing, do you have bank drafts in case I need to make a big purchase?” I might need it over Christmas.

He reached down and pulled out a small book. “Here are twenty-five.” He opened it to the first one. “Write who it is to, how much, sign, and then press your vault key here in the square last. The vault key impression identifies it as real and will burn up the draft if you do not have enough funds to cover it. Bank drafts are guaranteed after they have been seal with a key. That will be another three Galleons.”

I barely held my blistering retort in as I put three more coins on the counter, and grabbed my new book of bank drafts. My business done, I put my new things away and started to leave. Before I got to the doors, I put my hood up, just in case Dawlish was still there.

He was and he was scrutinizing everyone who came out of the bank.

While he looked at me suspiciously, I walked past him like I had no clue who he was, and since he couldn’t see my face and couldn’t really stop everyone who had their hood up, which was most of us, I was able to walk on. Fortunately, I was wearing a black cloak, like everyone else. I stepped into a side alley and thought about my next destination.

A second later, I was in the attic of Grimmauld Place.

“Buckbeak.” I bowed low and held it.

He looked at me carefully before bowing back.

I walked up to him with a smile. "Say old friend, how would you like to return to the forest?"

The bird seemed to get excited, making a lot of clicking noises with his beak and moving from foot to foot.

"I'll take that as a yes. This is going to feel strange, but I promise I won't hurt you." I held onto his neck and transported us, landing in the paddock behind Hagrid's hut. Buckbeak squawked tremendously, but to his credit, he didn't attack me. "That's a good hippogriff," I said soothingly as I stroked his neck. "Hagrid will take care of you again."

A barking dog caught my attention and I guessed that the squawk had been heard. "I gotta go, old friend. I'll try to come visit you." After a last pat, I transported myself away. It wouldn't do for Hagrid to catch me here; that would raise too many questions too soon.

A second later, I was in a corner on Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

Since it was twenty minutes before eleven and there were a lot of people around, I quickly boarded the train and claimed a compartment in the last car. Putting my expanded trunk in it, I closed the door and locked it with a spell to keep everyone else out. I then went back out to the platform and conjured a chair. I guessed my girlfriend wouldn't be here until about ten minutes before the train left, so I might as well make myself comfortable while I waited.

I hadn't seen her in two days. Last night had been so hectic where she was, we hadn't been able to do more than say hello on the mirrors while she hid in the bathroom for a few minutes. I was bummed about that, but at least I had seen her most nights after we had gotten together. Needless to say, I was really looking forward to seeing her again. I found it amazing how quickly I missed her.

I did take the time I spent waiting trying to guess what might happen. With Ginny, my thoughts gave me a big grin.

Seeing Hermione would probably go OK. Hermione had included a letter of apology for agreeing with Dumbledore in the basket after I had heard her and Ginny talking. She wrote that she should have

known better, especially after last summer when he had asked the same thing. She admitted to having a hard time saying “no” to the Headmaster, but she promised never to agree to withhold communication from me again no matter who asked. Hermione made mistakes like all of us, but unlike some, she did try to make things right. This was another example of why she was a close friend.

On the other hand, Ron had only written me once since I overheard the conversation between him and Ginny in the library. The only thing of importance in his letter was that he said we needed to talk, but that a letter would not be a good way to do it. For the moment, I gave him the benefit of the doubt and made the assumption that Ron was going to apologize when we got together. If not, he was going to be in a world of hurt, and I suspected Ginny would be the one delivering it. My plan was to mostly ignore him until he apologized to me.

Neville walked up at that time. I had written him a couple of times over the summer.

“Hey, it’s good to see you.”

“You too, Harry.” He grasped my arm for a moment. “You do look a lot better than normal, just like you said you would,” he said with an easy grin.

“Yeah, Mrs Weasley is a good cook. Things still good at your house?”

“Mostly.” He whipped out a new wand. “This works a lot better than my old one.” He put it up. “Harry, thanks again for letting me go with you. It meant a lot to me, and well, Gran told me she was proud of me for standing up with you against the Death Eaters. She’s, uh, she’s never said that before and I really appreciate you giving me the chance.” The last part came out in a rush and he blushed a little. Neville was maturing and I was happy for him. I guess it has to happen to us all sooner or later. I knew my new power had given me a lot of new confidence and made me feel more grown up.

“As I told you in my letter, I’m sorry you got hurt, but I’m also glad it all worked out.” I held my hand out and he grabbed it and looked at me



while we shook. "I got us a compartment, the last one, in fact. The password to unlock the door is 'Ginny', if you want to join us."

Neville grinned. "Is there something happening with the two of you?"

I smiled and said, "You'll find out soon."

He chuckled. "Well, thanks for letting me join you."

"Tell Luna she can join us if she likes, if you see her," I told him just before he turned. He gave me a wave as he left.

I turned back to the entrance to the Muggle side just as a family of redheads walked through. I couldn't stop the goofy grin on my face as I started walking that way, slowly at first and then faster. The first redhead was searching like a Muggle radar, and when she saw me, she let go of her trunk and ran to me, jumping at the last second, throwing her arms around my neck. I grabbed her and swung her around so I wouldn't fall over. When I stopped spinning, she pulled her legs up and put them around my waist like she was trying to shimmy up a tree. Then she captured my lips with hers and kissed me for all she was worth. It was all I could do to hold her up by her sides and not fall over.

"Harry," she purred when she finally pulled back, "there's a much better place for you to put your hands than my sides."

"I'd love to, but your mother and brother are right behind you and I don't think that would be a good idea at this time," I quietly pointed out.

"Bugger," she softly retorted.

"Ginevra Molly Weasley!" came a hoarse hiss. "Get down this instant. You make yourself look like a..."

"Mrs Weasley! Hi!" I really didn't want her finishing that sentence. Ginny would get angry and I preferred a happy Ginny. Also, I might need to defend Ginny, and I really didn't want to have to hurt the woman who fed me for most of the summer.

I lifted a little on Ginny and she got the message. She dropped her legs and I set her down. That's when I noticed that her faded jeans looked painted on her and her black T-shirt fit her like a second skin. I was going to have to check out this outfit later.

"Mrs Weasley, thank you so much for all the food this summer. You were really wonderful." To further fluster her, as she looked like she was about to deny she had done all that much, I stepped over and gave her a quick hug. She was so surprised that she didn't hug me back, for which my ribs thanked her.

When I pulled back, I looked over at Ron, to see what was happening on that front, and watched him cycle through several emotions, mostly shock and anger related -- typical Ron. I lightly slapped him on the shoulder. "Hey Ron, good to see you. We need to talk soon." I moved to the next person before he could get himself jump-started on some needless rant.

Hermione had a bashful smile.

"Hermione, it's really good to see you." I gave her a quick hug which she returned. "Any progress on getting a boyfriend?" Bullseye! I scored big time and mentally celebrated her world-class blush. "I guess not then, perhaps we can talk later about how to get him to notice you sooner." She continued to blush and Ron cycled back towards anger. There were days I wondered why I considered him my best friend.

My new best friend eagerly put an arm around my waist as I stepped back over to her and I put my arm around her shoulders.

"When did that happen," Mrs Weasley asked as she pointed at the two of us, "and why didn't you tell me, young lady?" Fortunately, Mrs Weasley didn't sound angry at all. She looked more puzzled than anything.

I squeezed Ginny's shoulder, hoping she'd let me answer, and she did. "I think at about the second basket of food. I finally realized there

was this really great girl, who was also cute, right in front of me and I would be stupid to let her get away.”

“That’s my sister.” Ron finally found his voice.

“Ooh, well spotted, brother,” Ginny said sarcastically.

Hermione looked like she was about to bust a gut as she held her laughter in. I wondered how long she had known Ginny had a boyfriend and if she had already known it was me.

The train whistle blew its warning signal before the argument could grow any worse, or the interrogation could continue. Mrs Weasley had to get one more in though.

“Ginny, dear, I expect you to write me in the next day or two and tell me all about this.” She stepped forward and gave her daughter a quick hug, and then me one too. “I’m glad you two are together. I’ve always thought you’d make a nice couple.” She then turned to Ron. “Good-bye dear, have a good term, and behave.”

“Mum!”

“Don’t you go giving Ginny or Harry a hard time about this. If you do, you’ll answer to me, assuming they leave anything for me to deal with.”

I was amused at her pragmatism, but perhaps that just showed how well she knew her children.

She hugged him again and patted him on the back. Ron looked like he couldn’t believe his mother was doing that in front of everyone else.

I took the few steps over and grabbed the end of Ginny’s trunk. No one saw my hand briefly flash blue while I did a little magic before I picked the trunk up like it was empty, which is how it felt to me. I easily carried it and put my other arm around Ginny, guiding her over to the train. I saw my chair still there by the train, but decided to not worry about it. It was conjured and would eventually disappear.

It didn't take long to reach my compartment. Neville and Luna were already there sitting beside one another and talking. I said hi to Luna as I shoved Ginny's trunk under our bench and took the seat next to the window and across from Luna. Ginny happily sat on my lap with her back to the window. Hermione sat next to me and Ron took a seat next to Neville.

"I was right, you did have a boyfriend," Hermione announced to everyone, confirming my guess.

"But you didn't know who, did you?" I asked her.

She frowned. "No, and I'll admit that you surprised me. I didn't think you'd start dating until late this year or sometime next year. I don't count the one broken date with Cho."

"That's OK," I told her with a grin. "I don't count it either."

"But you said you were dating Dean," Ron said accusingly to his sister.

I squeezed Ginny's hand before she could explode at him, which I could see she wanted to. "No, Ron. She asked what if she had chosen him. It took me a while to realize the 'if' in her question, and that she had said it vaguely."

"But, but..."

"It was fun teasing you and letting you think the wrong thing," Ginny told him, not quite as angrily as I thought she would be.

"When did you figure out she had a boyfriend," Luna asked Hermione.

"About a week ago. She was too happy compared to everyone else. She also disappeared too much." Hermione looked at her friend. "I guess that's when you were reading and writing his letters? I didn't see you doing that any other time."

Ginny smiled and nodded. I knew it was the partial truth. After I had started visiting her, the letters didn't say much, other than "sweet nothings".

The train started to move and after it quit lurching, Hermione stood. "Let's go, Ron. We have a Prefect meeting soon."

"Right," he said, but shot the two of us an accusing look. I had no fear of him or his brothers.

When it was just the four of us, Luna said, "Well, I'm happy for you. True love is the best defense against Wrackspurts." She then dug into her small bag and pulled out a Quibbler.

"Thanks, Luna!" Ginny said brightly. I looked at Neville who gave me a wry smile. We both knew there was only one Luna Lovegood, and that was a Good Thing.

Ginny started to chuckle.

I looked at her, wondering what was going through her mind. Neville was also giving her a strange look as Ginny didn't soon stop. Luna continued to look through her paper. "What?" I finally asked.

"I forgot to tell you about what happened last night. My parents and their friends," she raised her eyebrows briefly to let me know she meant the Order of the Phoenix, "had a get-together with the whole group. It was the first time everyone came over. The first time Fletcher and Snape tried to come over." She grinned impishly.

"Your're parents are friends with Snape?" Neville asked incredulously, his eyes opened wide.

Ginny nodded. "He's not their favorite person, but when the extended friends come over, he drops by sometimes," she improvised. Neville nodded his understanding, although he still had a distasteful expression, which I completely agreed with.

"Anyway," she looked at me pointedly, "of the two, Snape got there first and almost broke his nose when he tried to walk in the door."

She burst into chuckles again. Neville and I joined her, while Luna looked up and actually smiled.

“He swore up a storm as he tried to get in, blaming you for it, I should add. Fletcher got a nice bruise on his forehead when he tried to get in.” She paused to giggle for a brief moment. “The best was watching Dumbledore trying to figure out why they couldn’t get in. After a while, he pulled my brother Bill over and had him try to determine why only those two couldn’t enter the house.” She shook her head as she grinned furiously.

“And?” I prompted her, enjoying the tale.

“It was Bill that finally determined that the wards were keyed to those two and were keeping them out. No one could figure out how they got that way either. It was so funny, you really should have seen it.”

I’m sure my smile lit my face. “Yeah, too bad for them; but it does sound funny.”

“Better still, I don’t think they ever had their meeting they were so flustered. Although,” she drawled the last word, “Remus seemed to find it all very amusing.”

I laughed. “I’m sure.” I thought about that for a moment. “You know, that may be why no one showed up at my house this morning to bring me to King’s Cross, forcing me to come on my own.”

Ginny snuckled. “Right, as if that wasn’t your plan anyway.”

I gave her a wink and squeezed her waist slightly.

We talked about various inconsequential things, or so I thought, until Ron and Hermione returned. Personally, I just enjoyed holding Ginny and feeling her lean against me and put her head on my shoulder while we talked.

Hermione walked in but Ron stood in the doorway. “Potter, we need to talk ... privately.”

Ron didn't seem angry, but he was very serious. This looked more like "the big brother speech" than an apology, especially since he used my family name. Ginny seemed to think so too.

"Ron..." her voice held a lot of warning, which Ron ignored.

"Ginny, I can talk to my best mate alone if I want to."

I was surprised he was standing up to her. Normally, he folded like a one of those cheap metal chairs. "Don't worry," I whispered in her ear. "I won't hurt him too badly if he tries something stupid."

Ginny chuckled and kissed me on the cheek before getting up. When I stood and looked at Ron, he did not have a pleased look on his face. I followed him out and he led me about half way down the car and into an empty compartment. I stood while waiting for him to close the door.

Ron glared at me. "Harry, you're my best mate and in some ways, the best person for my sister, but I'm warning you, you do the wrong thing with her or hurt her and you'll have to answer to me and then my other brothers."

I stood there for a moment and let him glower at me before I started laughing. Now he got angry and advanced towards me. I flicked a finger just before he got there and he ran into a small shield and bounced back, shock all over his face.

"Now it's my turn," I told him with what I hoped was an evil smile. I must have succeeded because he suddenly looked really fearful, but that could have been because he bounced off of a shield and I hadn't pulled my wand. "First, Ginny is a big girl. She's fifteen, smart, powerful, and has a temper. She can take care of herself. Second, as you have just seen, I can take care of myself far better now than I could a few months ago, so there is nothing you can threaten me with that will make stop from dating your sister. Even threatening me with your mother is not a good enough threat, and mostly because she said she likes the idea of Ginny and me together. So, my advice to you is to drop the 'protective big brother' act and be a friend and a

brother like you were before you heard the news that doesn't even affect you. Do you have any questions?"

He shook his head.

I was hopeful that he really did understand. "Was there anything else you wanted to tell me? Your last letter indicated you did."

He shook his head again.

It was hard not to sigh. I guess I had scared him too much. "Well, if you change your mind, come find me." I walked past him and he didn't do a thing to stop me. Perhaps I did get my "don't mess with me" point across adequately.

Back in our compartment, Ginny quickly stood and let me sit so she could sit back on my lap. Ron did not immediately return with me.

"Where's Ron?" Hermione asked.

"Either he'll be here in a moment, or he's thinking about a new order in the universe. It was tough to tell which." I shrugged and didn't worry about it.

Hermione gave me a disappointed look while Ginny snuck and then started laughing, easily guessing what had happened. Neville grinned, while Luna just blinked at me. I was pleased with myself.

A moment later, Ron opened the door and sat down beside Neville. He did not look happy; in fact, he appeared to be sulking. That made Ginny laugh some more, which made Ron look more upset. I found the whole thing hilarious, but contained my response to a grin.

Fate took that moment to hand me a present, no doubt to make up for all the other hideous things I'd had to endure. The door was opened and there stood Draco Malfoy with his two followers behind him. It was time for his regular visit, the last one ever, if I got my wish.

"Potter," he drawled.



“Congratulations, Malfoy,” I told him excitedly as if he had just won a prize, “you know my name. Now that you’re here, I can explain a couple of things to you.”

“What could you possibly know that I care about?” he sneered.

“Two things, Malfoy. One, I’m so tired of you insulting me and my friends, as well as making a pest of yourself, that I’m telling you this is the last warning you’ll ever get from me. Leave us alone, or after this, I’ll make you sorry you were ever born. Two, that means you have a choice at this moment. You can either leave by nicely closing the door and walking away, or you can leave by throwing yourself out the window. Your choice.”

As he looked at me, I let my hand behind Ginny’s back, where no one else could see it, do a small wave causing the window to drop down so it was wide open. All heads but mine turned and looked at the window; I watched Malfoy to make sure he didn’t take that moment to attack us. I was also wishing that I could do magic without hand motions, but I had yet to figure out how.

After a long moment of everyone hearing only the wind whip in the window and the sound of the train be louder than normal, Malfoy’s laughter rang out.

“You’re amusing, Potter, I have to hand it to you. How did you get the window to open right then?”

I gave him my evil smile. “I simply asked it to. It’s time to decide, Malfoy.”

He stared at me. “I don’t think any of you could make me leave if I didn’t want to, especially not your Mudblood or loony friends ... or even that little tart on your lap.”

That made me angry, but I kept my voice level. “That’s the final straw, Malfoy. Never say I didn’t give you a chance to do the right thing.” With a wave of my hand, still behind Ginny, Malfoy’s limbs snapped next to his body and he went flying across the compartment and out the window, squealing like a girl as he exited the train. Looking out

the window, I saw a grassy embankment and a meadow. Of all the bad luck, I had hoped we were on a bridge over a deep ravine.

I looked back at the other two Slytherins. "Crabbe, Goyle, you have the same choice. How do you plan to leave?"

The two big bullies looked at each other for a moment, then Crabbe looked back at me and nodded before he closed the door to our compartment and the two walked away. A last hidden wave of my hand caused the window to go back up.

"Look at that. Crabbe and Goyle have more brains than Malfoy," I said with laughter in my voice. Ginny and Neville were laughing with me. Luna had a sweet smile as if she had been given chocolates. Ron was coming out of his funk and starting to smile.

Hermione was glaring at me. "Harry, how could you? Do you know how much trouble you're going to be in? You'll probably be expelled."

"Me?" I asked incredulously, knowing I had to play my part to the hilt. "What did I do other than tell them to leave us alone? Did you see me pull my wand and cast a spell? This hand," I lifted my left from Ginny's knee, "was in plain sight, and this one," I pushed my right one out to the side of Ginny making it visible, "was on Ginny's back."

"You could have cast with the hand behind Ginny's back," she accused me.

I sighed, I couldn't help it, even if it was part of the act. I held my left arm out to her. "Feel the inside of my forearm. Go ahead," I encouraged her.

She looked at me like I'd lost my mind, but she finally did. She looked surprised when she felt something instead of my bare forearm she was looking at.

"That's my wand holder, which is disillusioned." I pulled my right arm out from around Ginny and grabbed the end of my wand and pulled it out. As it started to come out, it became visible. "As you can see, my

wand was on the arm that was visible to you the whole time and in a place I couldn't get to. So, I obviously didn't cast any spells with it."

She was at loss for words for a minute. "But ... then how did Malfoy go flying out the window?"

I shrugged. "Beats me, other than maybe the power of suggestion." Everyone but Hermione cracked up. We spent the rest of the ride coming up with theories on what happened. Each idea was funnier than the last. It was one of the best train rides ever. Of course, Ginny's presence on my lap helped to make that so for me.

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In Hogmeade, Ron let the others leave the compartment first and stopped me. Ginny was right in front of me in the doorway and looked at me. I nodded to her and she walked on, although I didn't think she went far. I turned my gaze to Ron and waited.

"Uh, Harry, I'm sorry about the thing with Ginny," he said vaguely, looking at my chest.

I gave him a nod. I had never understood why it was so hard for Ron to apologize. I assumed it was the Weasley pride. I'd have to ask Ginny about that later.

"And, uh, sorry about the letters. You know how hard it is to go against Hermione and Dumbledore." He glanced up at my face before looking back to my chest. It gave me a small understanding of how girls must feel when guys stare at them.

"I'll accept on one condition." He swallowed and eventually looked up as I paused. "Don't do it again, no matter who asks. Either you're my close friend or you aren't, and my close friends wouldn't promise to do something they know I wouldn't like."

He sighed and nodded.

I smiled at him to dispel the seriousness. "Come on, Ron. Let's go get a ride so we can get something to eat." I knew that appealing to his stomach was a sure way to motivate him.

He grinned at me and we walked out of the compartment. Sure enough, Ginny was standing in the hallway just barely out of sight from the compartment windows. She looked happy to see us. It didn't take a genius to figure out she had heard the whole conversation.

Outside, we found the other three waiting on us and we all squeezed into a carriage to ride to the castle.

When the carriage dropped us off at the castle, Snape was at the front door.

"Potter! I'll see you expelled for what you did to Mr Malfoy, and if that fails, I'll see you in detention all day every Saturday and Sunday for the entire term." Snape's legendary sneer was firmly in place.

Damn! How did he learn about what happened to Malfoy so fast? Then Crabbe and Goyle stepped out of the shadows, which answered my question. No matter, I was ready for this.

Before I could answer, I heard Ron sucking his breath in. It wasn't hard to guess he was thinking of my not being on the Quidditch team because of this.

"Professor, according to the School Handbook, the term has not officially started, therefore only the Headmaster has the possibility of assigning punishment for something that might or might not have happened on the train. Second, he can do so only after an investigation, which obviously has not happened because he has not talked to the other six people that witnessed Malfoy's attempt to mimic a bird," I told him far more calmly than I felt. I felt like just blasting him backward against the wall like I had with my uncle, but I managed to contain my anger.

I then felt a Legilimency probe from him and I called up my magic. I grabbed his probe and pulled on it as if on a rope. He screamed and staggered back. I had no idea what that had done to him, but it didn't

appear to be pleasant. I was quite pleased with myself, which helped to remove some of my present anger.

“Potter, I’ll see you expelled for attacking a teacher,” he said venomously while holding his right hand to his temple.

“Excuse me, Professor? I was just standing here.” I said innocently as I turned to my friends. “Did anyone see me do anything?” I got five negative responses. “Perhaps you should visit the hospital wing, Professor, since it appears you don’t feel well.” I was enjoying this far too much and I now understood why Dumbledore always had a calm grandfatherly appearance. He was probably laughing on the inside at everyone.

When Snape raised his other hand to his head and said nothing, I shrugged and walked around him. My friends and the group that had gathered to watch followed, leaving the professor and Malfoy’s cohorts behind.

As we sat down at the Gryffindor table, Ginny on my right and Hermione on my left (Ron and Neville across from me), Hermione hissed, “Harry, you are going to be in so much trouble.”

I couldn’t help the fun I was about to have, I really couldn’t. “For what?” I asked in my best normal and confused expression while we waited for everyone to get seated. “I was just standing there. You saw me.”

“Then why did he accuse you of attacking him?”

“Because he hates me and he’s a childish greasy git, but you already knew that, right?”

Hermione fumed and Ginny chuckled. I leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on the lips. Ginny gave me an impish smile for my trouble.

“Will you two stop that?” Ron spat, as if he had just been slapped on the back of the head or something.

"Then don't look." The funny part was that he got that in stereo, from Ginny and myself. Neville, Ginny, and I all chuckled.

McGonagall came in at that moment with the Firsties and the Sorting ceremony began. Not counting Ron still eating like a goat, the feast after the ceremony went pretty well. OK, some guy named Slughorn was named the Potions professor and Snape was named the Defense professor, which sucked as that was my favorite class. Otherwise, the rest of the feast was good.

When Dumbledore dismissed everyone, McGonagall quickly made her way over to us. "Mr Potter, the Headmaster would like to see you in his office -- now please."

"Sure, Professor. Ron, Hermione, Neville, we'll see you later," I told them. I held onto Ginny's hand and pulled her with me after our guide. Ginny gave me a questioning look and then stopped worrying and smiled. I'm glad she trusts me.

By the time we made it to the corridor, McGonagall noticed that I was still holding Ginny's hand. "Miss Weasley, this meeting is for Mr Potter only."

"That's all right, Professor," I said cheerfully, "I've invited her to the meeting."

"Mr Potter, you did not call the meeting and Miss Weasley was not invited," she said firmly.

"Professor, do you know what this meeting is about?"

"I do, Mr Potter," McGonagall said with a small nod. "You have a lot of explaining to do."

"Ah, then if I need to explain things, wouldn't it be reasonable for me to bring a witness to the events in question?" I did my best to sound reasonable and it must have worked, because she was actually thinking about what I said.

“Very well,” she finally said and continued on her way with us following.

I winked at Ginny, who had to stifle an amused reaction.

McGonagall gave the password and up we went. I came last and was disappointed that Ginny had her school robes on. I was going to have to get her out of those and wearing only jeans and a T-shirt again. I really needed to examine her figure more closely so I could remember it better when she wasn't around.

Walking into the Headmaster's office, I saw it was as cluttered as usual. All the portraits on the wall were silent but paying rapt attention. I saw the Headmaster and Snape, as expected. But I also saw Kingsley Shacklebolt, which was a surprise. He was wearing his Auror uniform. I wondered how he had been pulled into this and suspected that Lucius had thrown a fit and gotten the Aurors involved and Dumbledore had made sure the Auror was a member of the Order of the Phoenix. I wasn't all that worried, as they'd have a very hard time proving I'd done anything wrong, or at significantly wrong.

Dumbledore raised a bushy eyebrow. “Miss Weasley, I do not recall inviting you to this.”

“I invited her, Headmaster,” I said. “Professor McGonagall said that I was to explain some events, so I thought it reasonable to bring an eyewitness to all of the events of today.”

“That's actually a good idea,” Shacklebolt said in his deep baritone.

“Very well, each of you, have a seat.” Dumbledore folded his hands and leaned forward on his desk. “Harry, I'm very glad to see you. I don't know if you are aware, but something happened at your aunt's house this morning and the protective wards I installed there failed.”

I nodded acknowledgment, admitting nothing. Denial was going to be my defense for as many things as possible.

“In addition, when Miss Tonks showed up to take you to catch the Hogwarts Express, you were not at home.” He looked very concerned.

I blankly looked at him, waiting for a question. I truly had no plans to volunteer any information.

“So I’m sure you can understand that I was happy when Molly Weasley told me she had seen you on Platform 9 ¾ this morning.”

“Um, OK.” I continued to play dumb.

Dumbledore looked he was expecting some other response, like maybe concern that something might have happened to my relatives, but I had none to show. “How did you get to the train station this morning, Harry?” He must have given up on the subject of my aunt’s home.

“I caught a ride into London with my uncle,” I simply said. It was only a small lie. I did catch a ride in, just not with my uncle.

“But we did not see you leave with him.” Dumbledore seemed quite put out at this turn of events.

I shrugged. “I can’t help you with your watcher’s problems.” I stared back. He didn’t try a mental probe, thankfully for him. I had mentally vowed over the summer to never let my privacy be invaded again. I had something like Occlumency shields now. It was really a spell I had found over the summer, but it did the same thing. I had cast that spell on myself when I was coming up the stairs. I didn’t trust either Dumbledore or Snape not to use Legilimency against me; one would say “it’s for the greater good,” while the other hated me.

As if realizing he wasn’t going to be getting any answers, he finally went on. “Harry, some very serious charges have been leveled against you. First is the assault against Draco Malfoy. I was informed just minutes ago that he has been found and will live, but he has been hurt badly. You have been implicated in that. Second, Professor Snape says you assaulted him as well. If either of these accusations is true, I should expel you. What do you have to say for yourself?”

I found the “should” in that statement amusing. It made me wonder just how much leverage I had over him because of the prophecy. “I



would say that both charges are false and it's easily proved I didn't do either one of them."

Snape instantly stood up from where he had been leaning against the wall. He was obviously about to say something demeaning based on his angry expression, but Dumbledore raised his hand. It was with great effort Snape restrained himself and went back to leaning against the wall. This was going to be fun.

"Please explain yourself, Harry, because there are witnesses who say you did in each case," Dumbledore said.

"No, sir. There are people giving false accusations in each case. Shall we take them one at a time?" I love this calm, nothing is wrong, approach. It's a lot more fun than the "I'm angry at everything" approach I used all the time last year. Of course, it helps a lot to have as much power as Merlin probably had! Hmm, Dumbledore is considered very powerful, maybe that idea explains Dumbledore's actions.

"That sounds reasonable. Let's discuss what happened on the train first."

"As you wish, Headmaster. There were six of us sitting in our compartment on the train minding our own business. As with every other train ride, whether coming from or going to Hogwarts, Draco Malfoy came into our compartment uninvited and proceeded to insult us, despite the fact that he is a Prefect and should know better." Snape looked angry at that slight, but held his tongue, so I continued. "I told him I was tired of him doing that and that this was his last warning to leave us alone. I then told him that as a result of said warning, he had a choice to leave by walking away or by going out the window. He proceeded to insult us again and then he flew out the window. None of us had our wands out."

I wasn't sure how Snape was keeping his protests to himself; it was amazing.

"You're saying that Mr Malfoy flew out the window on his own? How do you explain that, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, as if he was inquiring about a lesson.

"I have no idea, Headmaster. You can ask Ginny or any of the others there, I never pulled my wand out and my wand was in my wand holder on the arm that was visible to everyone the entire time. If you like, you can check for the last spells cast." I pulled my wand and held it out.

Dumbledore looked surprised I'd offer to do that, but he took my wand anyway. He cast Priori Incantato on it and we all watched images of a packing spell, two cleaning spells, a repairing spell, and a cutting spell come out before he stopped the revealing spell.

"I'm satisfied he did not cast any spells on Mr Malfoy. Kingsley?" Dumbledore looked to the Auror.

"I agree. Miss Weasley, what would you say about the incident?" The Auror looked at her.

"I agree with Harry's story. The only thing he left out was that I was sitting on his lap, so he never stood up and fought in any way. Also, because he was holding me so I wouldn't fall on the floor, his hands were not free to have cast any spells." She blushed a little at pointing out that part about my hands, but she didn't back down. "If Crabbe and Goyle said Harry did something to Malfoy to make him fly out the window, they were lying to get him in trouble."

Ginny had done a masterful job of backing me up. I probably owe her several long kisses for it.

Dumbledore looked perplexed. "Do you have any theories on why Mr Malfoy went out the window?"

"I think he was so scared of Harry he threw himself out. He was screaming like a little girl." Ginny was hilarious; she had said that with a straight face. Her sense of humor was one of the reasons I like her so much.

Snape couldn't hold it in any longer. "That's preposterous!"

Ginny sat there and said nothing, just like I did. She understood that there was no logical explanation and they would have to come up with their own theories.

"You're not going to let him get away with this, are you?" Snape was all but shouting.

"Professor Snape!" McGonagall said sharply, causing the man to look at her. "If there is no evidence, then Mr Potter can not be held accountable. That's why we are investigating -- as the school policies call for."

Snape looked like he wanted to protest, but even he understood this couldn't be pinned on me. "Then what about his attack on me?"

"What attack, Professor?" I asked innocently. "When I came up to the castle, you instantly started accusing me of doing things to Malfoy. When I denied it, you started acting like I attacked you. Again, I never pulled my wand and cast a spell at you, as the revealing spell showed."

"You attacked me with Legilimency!" he snarled.

I couldn't help it, I laughed. Everyone looked at me strangely.

"Please explain yourself, Harry," Dumbledore commanded, and there was no doubt it was a command.

"Headmaster, he basically raped my mind in the guise of allegedly teaching me Occlumency last year, which he said I was no good at. So if I couldn't learn Occlumency, how am I supposed to know Legilimency and be able to do it without a wand or an incantation?"

Dumbledore sighed. "He has a point, Severus."

"I'm telling you, Headmaster, he attacked me."

I cleared my throat and everyone looked at me. "If you plan to believe him, then I'd like to file charges against Professor Snape for attacking me with Legilimency multiple times over the last five years. I would have to think that an adult isn't supposed to do that to a minor." I looked at Shacklebolt.

"You are correct, Mr Potter, that is a crime." Shacklebolt looked at Snape. "These sorts of attacks are almost impossible to prove, but if you want to pursue this charge, then I will also have to accept his request to investigate your actions against him for the last five years."

Snape looked at me and then at Dumbledore, who sat there passively. Swearing under his breath, Snape stalked out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Several portraits on the walls muttered their indignation at that display of anger.

"I'll take that as a no," Shacklebolt said quietly as he smiled. He looked at Dumbledore. "Unless you have a better explanation, Headmaster, I'll write my report to read that Draco Malfoy performed accidental magic on himself in his haste to leave the compartment. While unusual for someone his age, there are other known examples."

"I have no better theory at this time. Minerva?"

"Nor do I, Headmaster."

Dumbledore nodded. "I believe that concludes the investigation. I thank you for your time, Kingsley."

"Any time," Shacklebolt said with a smile and left via the Floo.

Dumbledore looked at me. "Is there anything you'd like to tell me, Harry, now that it's just us?"

"Nothing that I can think of, other than I hope you will talk to Professor Snape so he doesn't take his frustration out on me."

"I'll talk to him about it," Dumbledore promised.

“That’s good, Headmaster, because the same thing I said to Malfoy applies to Snape. I’m tired of his insults and I won’t take them anymore. If he does, you should expect to spend a lot of time dealing with it as I’ll appeal every detention he assigns me and every point he takes from me. If he attacks me magically, I will respond in kind -- with the exact same spells.”

“Harry,” Dumbledore sighed, “that is not the way to deal with this. You must take the high road and deal with this as an adult. You are sixteen now.”

“Headmaster, I believe you need to tell your Professor that, as he’s the adult being childish. I know he hates me because of my father, a man I never knew in any way. He has been nothing but cruel and hateful to me from my first class with him when I had no idea who Professor Snape even was. I will deal with this in an adult manner. Expect me to act just like any adult that man were to insult or cast a spell at as he walked down Diagon Alley.”

“Harry, you need to be the better man.”

I couldn’t help but smile at a feed like that. “Oh, I will be, Headmaster. I’ll show him who the better man is and can promise you that he will be the one spending quality time in the hospital wing, not I.”

Dumbledore sat there looking very disappointed. I decided I was done and stood; Ginny stood with me and I walked her out. To my surprise, when I passed McGonagall, she didn’t look upset at me. Instead, she looked slightly pleased. I could only guess at that reaction, but I was glad she wasn’t angry with me.

Back in the common room, I let Ginny repeat the story to Ron, Hermione, and Neville. I just sat there and lightly drew patterns on Ginny’s back. It would have been a lot more fun to do that on her front, but that would have gotten me slapped -- or worse. Still, the fantasy was entertaining to me.

After story time, I took Ginny over to a chair in the corner. My three friends had already gone up and there were only a few seventh years around, who I knew wouldn’t care about Ginny and me. So we spent

some time snogging, making up for not being able to see each other for the last couple of days. I also thanked her for defending me tonight. It was definitely good to be me.

The next morning, I had a surprise. In the bathroom, Dean stopped me as I left to get dressed.

“Hey, Harry?” Dean tentatively got my attention.

I stopped as I was about to leave the bathroom and return to my bed area. “Yeah?” I couldn’t imagine what he wanted.

“I, uh ... So, you and Ginny? I saw you holding hands last night...” He looked like he didn’t want to have this conversation, but his Gryffindor courage made him.

I gave him a big smile. “Yeah, she’s really wonderful. It’s one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. Why?”

He looked down for a moment. “So, I guess you got together during the summer?”

“About mid-July, just a couple of weeks after last term. Why?” I asked a little more insistently.

“Oh, OK then. It’s just that, well, Ginny and I had talked a little about maybe going out at the end of last year, so I was really surprised when she didn’t write me and I saw her with you.” As I stared at him, not glared, he seemed to gulp and hastily added, “Not that I’m saying you cut in on me or I’m upset or anything, ’cause you didn’t, but I was just wondering what happened.”

Based on how nervous he was becoming, I quickly glanced down at my hands to check them out. Nope, they were still normal colored, not blue. I gave a small shrug. “I heard her say on the train home that she was thinking about talking to you to find out what you were like, if that helps you feel better. I don’t know how to explain it, but I woke up to the fact that she was amazing and asked her if she wanted to be my girlfriend -- if she was free. She said she was free, so we got together.”

Dean nodded. "It was obvious to all of us that she did like you when she was younger," he said quietly, almost as if thinking out loud. He looked me in the eyes and said, "If you decide to break up with her, will you let me know as soon as you do?"

"You want to ask her out, don't you?"

He nodded. "I do, but I won't do anything while you're together. It wouldn't be right."

"Thanks Dean, and I can understand. She really is a wonderful person." I smiled as I thought of her before I answered him. "Sure," I agreed easily. "If we break up, I'll try to let you know first." My smile turned a little evil, "Assuming we do break up."

What could he really say to that? He gave a weak smile and a quiet, "Thanks," before heading to the shower. I went to my bed area and got dressed.

Downstairs I found Ginny and gave her a good morning kiss, enjoying her just that much more after my conversation with Dean. I didn't think I'd tell her about it, at least not anytime soon. We went on to breakfast together since neither Hermione nor Ron was around.

At breakfast, McGonagall came by and gave us our schedules for the year. I saw that my first class of the day was a double period of Defense Against the Dark Arts. I really questioned who hated me so much, because it seemed like no matter the year or subject he was teaching, I always had Snape teaching my first class -- except for my first year. Maybe there was one other year that wasn't true, but I couldn't think of one at the moment.

Looking up at the head table, I saw that Snape was up there and he did not look happy at all. I suspect that was a hold-over from last night. Joy. I knew he'd take it out on us during class unless Dumbledore had really made an impression on him. I would be ready if he tried something, I thought, enjoying a few fantasies of what might happen.

“Harry? What’s that evil smile for?” Ginny asked with a mischievous smile of her own. She must have seen where I was looking a moment ago.

“I’m just imagining what might happen in my first class.”

She pulled my schedule her way and looked it over. When she let go, her grin had turned evil-looking, too. “Don’t hold back,” she whispered to me, “but don’t get caught either.”

“Never,” I heartily agreed.

The talking in the Great Hall quieted down a bit and got my attention. I looked around like everyone else and spotted Malfoy slowly walking in. Hmm, either he was not hurt as badly as I was led to believe, or else he had dirt on Pomfrey to make her let him go sooner. It could be both, I considered. Not worrying about him, I pick up my knife and fork and resume my breakfast.

“Potter!” Ferret-boy yelled from across the room. “You’ll be sorry when my father finishes with you for what you did to me.”

“That would be your Death Eater father who’s sitting in Azkaban right now?” I yelled back, getting a few “ooh’s” from our audience. “Besides, why are you blaming me for your own clumsiness?”

He looked furious and I took joy in that. “One day, Potter, you’re going to end up just like your parents.”

All right, that’s it; the gloves come off now. Since everyone seemed to be looking at him as he shouted, I flicked a finger and my hand very briefly glowed blue. A plate of bacon flew off the table and hit him hard in the throat. Malfoy’s eyes bugged out as the metal platter clanged to the floor. A number of people looked at me, and I did my best to give a look of happy surprise while holding my knife and fork up near my face as if eating. I wanted to make it very clear I did not have my wand out. I didn’t worry about Malfoy dying, as there were too many teachers in the room, but I really hoped this taught him a lesson.



Snape went rushing down to where Malfoy was, doing some sort of spell to try to prevent him from choking to death from an injured windpipe. Since I was looking in the direction of the head table, I saw the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall scrutinizing me, but they did and said nothing.

Snape must have been successful as several Slytherins suddenly dropped their worried looks and the man stood up and glared at me. "Potter! A month of detentions with me for attacking another student!"

I stood up and faced the head table. "Headmaster, I appeal this unfair punishment. I was across the room and eating breakfast." I raised my hands, which still held my knife and fork. "I didn't even have my wand out and there was no spell seen traveling across the room. Personally, I suggest checking for pranking poltergeists, but I do not deserve punishment for this."

Dumbledore looked frustrated and I surmised he felt caught in the middle. "The punishment is canceled. I do not see how Mr Potter could have attacked Mr Malfoy."

Snape was livid, but he knew better than to argue a lost position, especially in front of all the students. He angrily levitated an unconscious Malfoy and took him back to the hospital wing.

I was pleased. I also wondered how many more of these episodes it would take before Malfoy learned his lesson and took my threat seriously and started acting like a civil human being.

During my first class of the day, I was hugely surprised at how well it went. Snape behaved himself and limited his attacks on me to death glares. I ignored him as I'd seen too many of those glares over the years for them to be an issue to me now. However, as I went to leave the room, I did flick my hand his direction while he was sitting at his desk. I wondered now long it would be before he tried to move his feet and found that his shoes had a Permanent Sticking charm on them, adhering them to the floor for a very long time.

The second morning of school started out nicely, or so I thought. Ginny was waiting for me in the common room and we walked to the Great Hall together. I know Hermione and Ron are walking behind us, but I hardly notice after the first half minute or so. Ginny and I are in our own world talking about what we each want to do one day.

"I really can't decide," Ginny told me. "I'm not sure if I'd rather play professional Quidditch or maybe run a magical creature preserve. Nothing like where Charlie works, as they have only dragons, but something more like a Muggle zoo, with magical creatures only."

"Either of those could be fun. I'm sure Luna could help you get some interesting specimens," I said with a straight face.

Ginny snuckled, despite trying to hold the reaction back.

"I can't decide what I really want to do. The Auror choice that I told McGonagall last year in my career counseling session no longer appeals to me. I mostly chose it to make fun of Umbridge." She chuckled with me, as I had told her that story during the summer. "I have to admit though, curse-breaking like your brother Bill does sounds interesting. Or maybe Enchanting, but I need to find out more about that first."

"Either of those could be fun," she readily agreed.

I sat next to Ginny at breakfast and we both dug in, I a little more heartily than she. However, I still used manners, unlike Ron. I briefly wondered how to break him of eating like there was no tomorrow. Maybe if we made him use chop sticks ... hmm, that was an amusing thought and I almost transfigured his silverware right then.

Midway through breakfast, the post owls for the morning flew in. To my surprise, a large eagle owl dropped a thick envelope in front of me and took off. The Gringotts seal on the envelope reminded me of my request and I happily put my silverware down and attacked the envelope, ripping it open. Ginny had an amused, interested look, but she gave me my privacy. I was glad she was the one sitting next to me, because I wasn't so sure Hermione would have been as accommodating, based on the looks she was giving me now. Ron

wasn't much better because of the way he was eyeing me over his plate. I almost put it away to read in private later, but Ginny was being a good sport about it and trying to engage my other two friends, who sat across the table, in conversation to keep them occupied.

I pulled out about a dozen sheets and read the top. It said it described the Potter family vault. I then looked at the first line of detail and almost dropped it all. Holy galloping Galleons! That was a large number! Oh, I'm sure there were a lot of things I still couldn't buy and there were a number of other families richer than I was, but with some frugal spending and some luck, I'd probably never need to work. That took a load off of my mind. I didn't need a high-paying job to survive, just any job.

Glancing at the rest of the details, there wasn't much excitement there. Every month, there was some money taken out to cover some fees, and money put in from investments. The last six years also showed a payment to Hogwarts; that was for my schooling. The credits were bigger than the debits, so the account was slowly getting larger. By the time I got to the end on page five, I had revised my initial guess. I really didn't have to work if I didn't want to. I still would, because I knew I'd get bored otherwise. Plus, even small fortunes could get spent if one was stupid.

Page six started my personal account, the one I visited every summer and had to hold me until I turned seventeen. Skipping to the last page of transactions, I saw that I had over thirty thousand Galleons left. There was no worry for my last year before the family vault became available to me.

Looking over the details, I saw the same kind of monthly fees, although there was no income. However, there was a steady transfer out every month since November of 1981. After deciphering the cryptic note on each of those line items, I almost blew a gasket. I quickly leafed through the rest of the pages. The only other withdrawals I saw were for school supplies these last six years. Everything else was in order. But that one monthly charge was there for every month, even for those months I was in school. And the one for this month had just been paid. In total, there was one month shy of fifteen years of these payments.

"That bastard!" I swore under my breath, not able to contain myself any longer.

All three of my friends looked at me. Before Hermione could chastise me for what I said, I looked at her and asked, "Quick, Hermione, what is 12 times 15 times 50?"

"Uh..." Hermione looked up for a moment as if the enchanted ceiling held the answer. "9000. Why Harry?"

"Because a certain grandfatherly bastard who had my vault key gave away 9000 Galleons of my money. Every month, there is a transfer for fifty Galleons to a Barclay's account with the name of Petunia Dursley on it."

"So, what's the problem, Harry?" Hermione looked perplexed. "It seems reasonable to give them some money to help take care of you."

I couldn't help the growl, which caused her to suddenly lean back and got the attention of a few others around us. "The problem, Hermione, is that they were given fifty Galleons a month to take care of me. This summer when I exchanged Galleons into Pounds, they gave me ten Pounds for every Galleon. That's five hundred Pounds a month to the people who starved me and never bought me a single thing that I'm aware of."

"That's horrible," Ginny softly swore, looking like she wanted to Bat-Bogey someone. "At least you can change it now so no more goes out."

"Actually, I can't. There's a note on the bottom that says my magical guardian must approve any changes or restrictions on this account."

"Who's your magical guardian?" Ron asked.

I gritted my teeth as I answered, "Dumbledore."

Ginny was softly growling and she was staring daggers at an old man who was blissfully unaware of the danger as he talked to his Deputy.

"But surely he wouldn't..."

"Hermione," I hissed, stopping her weak defense in its tracks. "That is the same man who dropped me off with them and then never checked up on me. It's also the same man who has let Snape and Malfoy do whatever they want to me for the last five years. So don't tell me he wouldn't give them money and then never follow up to make sure it helped me."

"What are you going to do, Harry?" Ginny asked quietly.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do." I pulled out the last sheet, which was a form to change my account, so thoughtfully provided by the goblins. It had a spot for my guardian to sign. He couldn't use the excuse that he didn't have the form. "I'm going to get him to drop this automatic payment and then reimburse me."

Before they could stop me, I stood up and started stalking towards the head table. I put all of the sheets in my pocket except for the form. By the time I reached the center of the head table, the eyes of every teacher and probably most of the students were on me. I didn't care.

Putting the form on the table in front of Dumbledore, I said in a very controlled tone that left no doubt I was restraining myself, "I need you to sign this, Headmaster. There is a monthly charge on my Gringotts account that must be removed immediately."

Dumbledore looked at the top of the form and then gave me his grandfatherly smile. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I can not. It needs to stay the way it is." His expression was one that indicated he thought the matter closed.

"I don't think you understand me, sir. My account will be changed so my relatives no longer receive any money, and you will reimburse me the 9000 Galleons you illegally authorized payment for," I said with a steely voice.

“Mr Potter! You will not speak to the Headmaster in such a way,” McGonagall chastised me.

“Professor, this has nothing to do with school and is between me and my magical guardian. I merely use his school title because it is habit.”

“Harry, I promised that payment to them when I left you with your aunt, and I promised the payments until you turned seventeen. So there must be another ten payments,” he told me, as if there was no other logical way to look at it.

“Mr Dumbledore,” I purposefully said, drawing a gasp from McGonagall and a few ugly looks from those professors I could see in my peripheral vision. “What you fail to realize is that you had no legal right or authorization to promise that money from my account unless you can show me a document from my parents. Secondly, not a single Knut of the money has been spent on me. Everything you gave them was spent on my cousin, my uncle, or my aunt. They never bought me clothes. They did not feed me half the time. They treated me as badly as the Malfoys treat their house-elves and worked me like one too. They neglected me far beyond what you did by never checking up on to see how badly I was treated.”

A grave look came over him. “Harry, I think we should continue this conversation in my office.”

“Not unless you sign the form first,” I said adamantly.

“Harry, these are things that should not be discussed in public.”

I suspected the entire population of the school was watching this, but I really didn't care and I didn't turn around to find out. “Only because you don't wish for others to see your rather large blunders.” He huffed at that and I could see him drawing his power up to intimidate me. Fine, I was ready to rumble if that that's what he wanted. “If you feel so strongly about paying them, then you pay them out of your own account and reimburse me. I want my money now, you old goat!” That was a little low, because that insult really applied to his brother, but I was really angry by now.

Dumbledore stood up and let his power out, like he did at the end of my fourth year when he had come crashing into Moody's office after me.

Before he could say anything, I confidently told him, "Puff up all you want, but you don't scare me. If you won't sign my form, I'll just go remove 9000 Galleons worth of stuff from your office." Yes, I was that angry. That was a rash and probably stupid thing to say, but I had worked myself up into a state of major anger.

"That's it, you insolent brat!" I heard from my right side.

As I turned my head, I saw a curse come at me from Snape. Instinctively, I put up my hand, which flared blue, just in time to block the curse. Willing my magic to respond, the curse rebounded. However, I was so angry by now, I pushed the curse back and it returned many times its original strength.

Snape hadn't expected anything like this. The spell hit his wand, causing it to explode. He cried out and slapped his left hand to his right wrist to try to stem the flow of blood. Everyone saw his mangled and bloody right hand.

I ignored all the gasps of surprise. "You're right, that's it, you greasy git! I'm not taking any more shit from you. But because I'm not as evil as you, I'll grant that you may not be in full control of yourself and give you one last chance, after I fix a problem."

With a pulse of blue from my hand, Snape was pulled to me over the head table, knocking food and dishes all over the place. When he reached me, I grabbed his robes and practically slammed him down to the floor -- the impact stunning him.

"Mr Potter!" I heard McGonagall yell from behind me.

"In a minute, Professor, I'm busy right now," I told her as I Vanished the snarky professor's left sleeve.

"Harry!"

“You’ll have to wait too, Dumbledore,” I called out as I put my hand on Snape’s Dark Mark. Over the summer, I had wondered how much the Dark Mark influences those who have it. I was about to find out.

Drawing up my power, I shoved it into Snape’s Mark. The man’s back arched like he had been hit with a Crucio; I didn’t really care and ignored him as I held tightly onto his arm. Calling up more power, I pushed harder into the Mark, exploring it and trying to figure out its magic.

A part of me realized that both of my arms were now blue with little dancing tongues of flames. I suspected my whole body was that way, but I was too busy trying to figure out what I was sensing. It was like there was a network inside the Mark. There were some other aspects to the Dark Mark that I didn’t understand, but I ignored them, blithely rushing on like a good Gryffindor.

“Merciful Merlin, he’s a full mage!” squeaked a voice in awe from behind me. I appreciated Flitwick telling me what I was, but I really was a little too busy at the moment to discuss it.

There, I now understood what I was “magically seeing” through the Dark Mark. It was like a huge tree with every leaf a Death Eater with a Mark. Since I had the connection and the power, I “plucked” each leaf, starting with those who were nearest.

When I plucked the first one, I heard a scream from inside the Great Hall. I recognized who that fake girlish scream came from, but I didn’t stop. I started plucking more. Two more screams sounded. I bet that would distract the teachers for a moment.

Then I felt something hit my back. Apparently, Dumbledore was trying to stop me. I let my magic deal with it, bouncing everything he shot at me right back at him.

During this time, I had now plucked over a dozen “leaves”. What I found interesting was there were only twenty more. That was it at the moment, thirty-seven Death Eaters and I knew who every one of them was. There were going to be some surprises.



As I finished my work through Snape, I realized I had not been hit in the back with anything else after that first spell from Dumbledore. As my last act, I “plucked” Snape and removed the Dark Mark from him. His body convulsed one last time and then he lay still.

I stood up and turned to face Dumbledore. It was the first time I’d ever seen him look scared. McGonagall was as white as a sheet, literally. I knew I wouldn’t be having any trouble with her flinging spells at me.

“There, now we’ll see if Snape is still the evil git he’s always been, or if it was the Dark Mark that made him that way.”

“Harry, do you realize what you’ve done?” Dumbledore looked and sounded incredulous, as if I had just destroyed the world.

Perhaps I had just destroy his view of the world, but I wasn’t bothered by that at all. “Yes, I’ve removed the Dark Mark from Snape.”

His eyes went wide. “You’ve also injured three students.”

“I did? I don’t remember touching them or casting spells at them. Why do you believe I injured them?” I loved denying things they would have a tough time proving. I did find it interesting that a Hufflepuff took the Dark Mark, not that I’d say that before they did. I also wondered if I needed to check the Sorting Hat for tampering.

Since Dumbledore didn’t look like he was going to cast another spell at me, I let my aura dissipate. “Now, as I was saying before someone distracted me by firing an unprovoked curse at me, Dumbledore, sign the form. If you do not, I will remove rare books from your office to pay for your damages to me.”

“I’m afraid things need to stand as they are. It’s all for the greater good.” He was glancing between me and the downed students. I suspected he was wondering which was the more important thing to do. I found it interesting that everyone else behind me was staying reasonably quiet and not freaking out. I guessed they wanted to hear about possible scandals. I’ve long since stopped trying to figure out the “sheep” in the castle.

“And I’m sorry that we have to part ways like this too,” I said. I really was sad. I had looked up to him a lot in my younger years, but now that I see things more clearly. I could no longer fully trust him. I really don’t think he’s evil, Fawkes’s presence helps to show that. But he’s clearly misguided and has forgotten that I’m a real person in whatever plan he has to defeat Tom Riddle.

“Harry, we must work together. It’s the only way to defeat Voldemort,” he pleaded, validating my thought.

The number of gasps I hear is sickening, especially from the number of professors I see reacting to the name.

Then I have an idea, a really fun idea. “No professor, that’s not true, at least not in the way you think about it.”

“What do you mean, Harry?” He looks worried. I wonder if he thinks I’m turning Dark. Hopefully he’s not that stupid.

Knowing I’m going to need to be very focused. I pull my wand out as I call up my magic. The blue aura and flames surround me again and I hear a number of “oohs and ahhs”, mostly from the Ravenclaw table. A quick glance at my girlfriend shows a big grin and a proud look.

Pulling up my magic into a huge surge, which causes a blue flare of light, I shout, “Accio Tom Riddle!” I felt a huge pull of magic, both out of me and into me. It was like I was sucking in magic from all around me and it was leaving just as fast through my wand. I felt my magic grab something and then yank hard. With a smile, I dropped my arm and waited.

“While an interesting idea, Harry, that will not work,” Dumbledore told me. “He is too far away, too heavy, and probably under far too many wards.” He turned to the school nurse, who just happened to be there for the meal. “Poppy, will you please see to Severus and then the students.” His voice broke her out of the reverie almost everyone was in and she hurried down. He turned back to me. “Now, will you please come to my office so we can discuss what has happened to you, Harry?”

A lot of students are whispering to their neighbor asking who Tom Riddle is. I wonder why Dumbledore hasn't spread that knowledge; it would be good for the war effort. But I ignored them and shook my head at Dumbledore. "Haven't you learned that magic is mostly about belief, well, belief and power?" I say with a smirk. A person did need a lot of power to do what I was doing now.

He chuckled. "While you are correct, no one has that much power, not even me, Harry." I found it amusing that he still considered himself more powerful, while I had just shown myself to be a Mage. I was pretty sure Dumbledore was not a Mage.

"Are you going to sign my form now?" I asked, stalling for more time. I could still feel the pull on me and the rushing of magic both in and out of me. The idea of needing to open the doors to the Great Hall, which were presently closed, occurred to me, but for fun, I left them as they were.

He stared at me, but to his good fortune, he didn't try a Legilimency attack on me. I would not have taken kindly to that. With resignation, he reached into his robes and pulled out what looked like a self-inking quill and leaned down and signed the form. I picked it up and looked at it carefully. I only needed a little bit longer. I wondered if Dumbledore was asking himself why my aura was still so bright.

"Thank you," I said magnanimously with a dip of my head before I put the form into an inside pocket of my robe.

"Please come with me, Harry."

"Just a little bit longer, please," I told him as I turned back around and faced the main double doors coming into the Great Hall.

"Headmaster," Pomfrey called from in front of me, "Other than magical exhaustion, I can't find anything wrong with him; but no matter what I do, I can't wake him up."

"Please take him and the others to the hospital wing. More tests can be done there," Dumbledore ordered.

Before anyone else could say or ask anything, the double doors burst open as something slammed against them. Everyone looked just in time to see a body come flying in, hit the Hufflepuff table about halfway down and then slide, knocking food and dishes everywhere, before coming to a rest right in front of me with his chin barely on the end of the table. Pomfrey was still kneeling on the floor next to Snape, so she was also now nose-to-nose with my new guest and she looked like she was about to dirty her knickers. In some ways, I really didn't blame her. He was pretty ugly.

Screaming filled the Great Hall, but I ignored it and looked at the ugly brute in front of me. I was surprised by the amount of eggs and jam on him. I also noticed that he looked really bruised and cut up, not to mention windburned. I wondered if he had gone through a window on the other end. Oh well, I didn't plan to ask as I didn't care. The monster was starting to groan and move his arms, which started another round of screaming.

Fortunately, I had already asked Magic for the needed spell while I was waiting, so I was ready. When he opened his eyes and looked at me, I jovially said, "Tom! So glad you could join us! Accio wand!" After I caught his wand and slid it into my pocket, I cast, "Amor principis osculum".

A light blue beam came out of my wand and hit Riddle in the head. His whole body glowed that color for a brief moment before his head dropped back onto the table and he went still. With a smile on my face, I conjured a rectangular platform, moved him onto it (and all the food on him too), and then conjured a glass dome over him. There, it was just like the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty. Or was it Snow White? No matter; he would be there for quite some time -- almost certainly forever.

Looking up at Dumbledore, I see that he appears to be having a heart attack. I suppose I can understand. It's probably not everyday that someone summons the current Dark Wizard into the Great Hall while everyone is at breakfast.

Everyone eventually stopped the screaming and yelling now that the excitement seems to be over. The normal buzz returned as they discussed what I've done. Over the din, a voice yells, "He's defeated Voldemort!"

I turn and look and realize it was Ginny. I watch her step up onto the table and walk over it. Jumping off, she runs to me. "And that's my boyfriend!" she shouts just before she jumps at me like at the train station. I swing her around and pull her to me. Unlike two days ago, I place my hands firmly under her cute derriere to hold her up, and not only does she not complain, she snogs the life out of me. I had a feeling she was doing this to claim her territory, and I was just fine with that.

When she pulled back and grinned, I gave her a kiss to show her how I felt. She was quite happy with that. In the meantime, everyone was cheering. Well, almost everyone. I snuck a look at Dumbledore and saw him sitting in his chair with his wand still out, watching Voldemort very carefully.

Eventually, he got up and motioned for me to follow him. I still had Ginny with her legs wrapped around my waist, so I carried her, having no reason to put her down. She silently giggled and made kissy faces at me as I carried her. Dumbledore floated the glass-topped casket I'd created behind him. The rest of the teachers had been given the task to restore order to the school; I did not envy them. The mess at the Hufflepuff table was of epic proportions.

At the stairs to his office, Dumbledore floated the casket over the edge and up to the floor his office was on. I put Ginny down as I didn't want to drop her on the stairs. She looked back at me and swayed her hips provocatively at me as she climbed up first. I gave her looks to make sure she knew I liked it, which caused her to quietly laugh. At the top of the stairs and before we went in, she took a quick moment to kiss me again. I loved that girl.

Walking in Dumbledore's office, we saw him backing away from his fireplace. A moment later, the fireplace flashed green and two people came out. Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt was back, and to my surprise, Director Amelia Bones.

“Harry has something for you,” Dumbledore told them, motioning to the glass-topped casket. If I didn’t know better, I’d say that Dumbledore was embarrassed he couldn’t explain this, but he played his cards so close to the vest, it was hard to tell.

The two Aurors walked over and looked. Despite the remnants of food on the body, it wasn’t too hard to tell who it was.

“Merlin’s ghost!” Bones swore. “It’s Him!”

“No, it’s Voldemort,” I said cheekily. I got a glare from Bones and a quiet snuckle from Ginny. Part of me wanted to pout when Ginny’s sound didn’t get a sour look.

Bones looked at Dumbledore. “How did this happen?”

“I’m afraid I can not take credit,” he said sagely. “Harry brought him here and put him in this state.”

She looked at me.

“I summoned him,” I answered.

“What?” Her eyes looked like they wanted to pop out of her head. Shacklebolt’s look was similar.

“I summoned him. You know, Accio Tom Riddle, wait a few minutes for him to come flying through the air, and voilà. He came through the doors, hit the Hufflepuff table and slid to a stop right in front of me.”

“That would explain the eggs and strawberry jam,” Shacklebolt’s deep voice said dryly. That earned him a glare from his superior before she looked to Dumbledore.

He sighed. “I know. I told him it wouldn’t work when he did it, but...” Dumbledore held out his hand towards Sleeping Ugly.

“And then what happened?” Bones asked me.

I guess she had to ask; it was her job to investigate. "I cast a spell to keep him from attacking anyone. So, I now hand him over to you to dispose of him so that he never attacks anyone ever again. I believe it is the Ministry's job to defend the populace from criminals. I know it's not my job, even if Dumbledore says there is a prophecy about me Vanquishing the Dark Lord." I snickered on the inside as Bones's head whipped around to look at Dumbledore. Ginny looked amused too. Strangely, Shacklebolt looked surprised; I guess Dumbledore didn't share even the part of the prophecy Riddle knew to the Order. That struck me as short-sighted, but who know what Dumbledore really thought.

"I assume this would be the prophecy the caused all the ruckus last June?" Dumbledore gave her a reluctant nod. "What did the prophecy say?" she asked.

When Dumbledore didn't answer, I said, "Basically, that the person who could Vanquish the Dark Lord was about to be born, he would be marked," I pointed to my scar, "and that I would have a power that Riddle didn't know, and finally that I couldn't really live my life until he was defeated. As far as I'm concerned, my part is done and he's all yours."

Dumbledore sighed. "Actually, Harry, you have more to do. Until he can be truly killed and you do so, then the prophecy is not fulfilled."

I laughed, I couldn't help it. Only Ginny didn't seem bothered by that. "You may interpret vanquish as kill, but I interpret it as defeat and I've done that. He's not waking up and I have no intention of killing anyone, even those that deserve it. There are other ways to punish them."

"What spell did you use on him," Bones asked with a glance back to the body under glass.

"Amor principis osculum," I calmly answer.

No one said anything for a moment. "That would be Love's First Kiss, if I remember my Latin," Bones finally said, breaking the long silence. "I've never heard of the spell, but why did you pick that?"

“Because Dumbledore insisted that love was the power that Riddle didn’t know, although I disagree.” I thought being a Mage was the answer, but then I’m not a barmy old man who thinks deep thoughts, either.

Dumbledore nodded, but Bones still looked puzzled. “And what does that charm do?”

“You’ve heard of Snow White, right?”

“The fairy tale or the real story?” she asked seriously.

That threw me for a loop. “You mean that story is real?”

“Mostly,” she admitted with a wry smile. “The tale has been changed a little over time, but it’s true for the most part.” She looked back to the body for a moment. “So, you’re implying that he can only be awakened by the kiss of his first love?”

“Uh-huh,” I answered smugly.

“Damn, that’s brilliant,” Shacklebolt murmured.

“And that brilliant person is my boyfriend,” Ginny said happily, squeezing me with her arm that was around my waist. I leaned down and brushed her cheek with a kiss.

Bones was smiling more and more as she thought it through. “Thank you very much, Mr Potter. I know Minister Scrimgeour will probably try to take some credit for this, but I’ll do my best to make sure everyone understands you did it all.”

“Whatever, I just want to enjoy life and not have to worry about a self-styled Dark Lord or his minions jumping out from behind some corner and trying to kill me,” I tell her with a shrug.

Shacklebolt snorted. “That seems unlikely now. Several people we thought were Death Eaters and were keeping an eye on fell over not long before we were called here. Or at least we thought they were



Death Eaters,” he said with some doubt. “We can’t find a Dark Mark on them.”

I smiled a little evilly, knowing it was because I removed their Dark Mark. “How fortunate for all of us.”

Dumbledore was still looking unhappy. “As much as I don’t want to do this, I believe I must point out that three students also fell unconscious when Harry was doing some magic to Severus Snape. I believe he is responsible for their condition.”

Ginny and I gaped at Dumbledore. What did he think he was doing? Was he trying to get me locked up in Azkaban or was he going senile? “A coincidence and your allegation can not be proven,” I said as I decided that Dumbledore would be getting very little of my help from now on. “I understand and agree with your idea of doing the right thing and not the easy thing, but these are Death Eaters we’re talking about. They deserved anything bad that happens to them.” At least he wasn’t pressing the issue with what I did to Snape, but then again, I was reacting to a deadly attack and he knew that was defensible.

Bones looked at me very intently for a moment before looking over to Riddle’s body. Turning to Dumbledore, she firmly said, “I’m afraid I can’t agree, Dumbledore, unless you can prove Mr Potter was responsible. I am unaware of any magic he could employ to do such a thing. I will also say that even if he is responsible, I would be more inclined to give him an Order of Merlin for doing so. However, if you insist upon an investigation, the only charges I could bring him up on are for acting in a vigilante manner, and if I do that, then there is an organization I’ve heard about called the Order of the Phoenix that I’d need to investigate too.”

I wanted to shout “Go Director Bones!” It was hard to keep a straight face.

Dumbledore blanched before quickly recovering. “I am also unaware of how he could have done it. I was merely pointing out the timing.”

Bastard! I thought again. He’s trying to have it both ways.

“Without further evidence, I rule that it was a coincidence.” Bones turned to me and gave me a lopsided smile so only Ginny and I could see it.

I could have given the stern woman a hug at that moment. Instead, I smiled ever so slightly and nodded formally to her. “Thank you, Director.”

After all of that, I decided I'd never tell Dumbledore that I noticed that all of the Dark Marks were visible while I was “in the Volde-mark network”, which makes sense when you think about it. I mean, Riddle would press his wand to one guy's arm and they would all come to him. Anyway, I just removed the Mark from all of the Death Eaters. I know who they were and could give the names of all thirty-seven. I'm tempted to send an anonymous letter to Bones about that, but it would probably give me away.

“You're welcome.” I shook her extended hand. “Mr Potter, on behalf of the Ministry, I most sincerely thank you for your capture of ... Tom Riddle. You should expect an Order of Merlin for this, a First Class award if I have my way.”

“You're welcome,” I told her with a slight nod. She was a bit intimidating at first glance, but I liked her the more I got to know her.

Bones got Dumbledore to make the casket a Portkey and the Aurors left with their prisoner.

“Harry, we have one more thing to discuss.”

“Good, I'm glad you didn't forget the reimbursement for what you gave the Dursleys from my vault without Potter permission.” I wasn't going to let him off easy.

His disappointed look returned, not that I cared. “Harry, that really isn't important.”

I smiled at winning the battle. “Lovely! I'm glad you see it that way. Since it isn't important to you, then you can pay me 9000 Galleons.” I

knew it really should be 50 less than that, but let's call the extra interest.

"I'm afraid I don't have that much on me," he said dryly.

"Do you have your vault key?"

"Yes. Why?"

I smiled and held out my hand. It turned blue and a couple of seconds later, my little book of bank drafts appeared in my hand, courtesy of a very special summoning charm to retrieve it from my trunk in my dorm room. "Here," I said very helpfully as I tore out a draft, "you may use one from my book."

He sent me a piercing look, but proceeded with writing out the draft and pressing his key to it, since I had so neatly boxed him into a corner. Ginny looked to be having a very difficult time holding her amusement in. Her leg was bouncing as if she couldn't sit still from excitement.

Dumbledore handed me the signed draft which also had a generic key image in the box and a bold "VERIFIED" written over it.

"Thank you, I appreciate you correcting your mistake."

"Yes, well, what I really wanted to discuss was your magical power now," he said very seriously.

I shrugged. "Professor Flitwick said I was a Mage. I didn't know that, but I see that he's correct." I cocked my head as new information came to me from a question I asked Magic. "I'm the first one since Merlin."

"How do you know that, Harry?"

"I asked Magic," I explained as if it should have been obvious. Ginny looked very surprised; I thought I had told her I could get information from Magic, but I guess not. Or perhaps she was surprised to see me actually do it.

He looked at me strangely for a moment. "That's how you know about the charm you cast on Riddle to keep him asleep, wasn't it?"

"Of course. I find it useful to study because that knowledge comes a lot faster, but anything magical that I really need to know is available if I only ask for it." Magic was really great as it could provide for almost anything. There were real limits: creating real life was the most obvious, and the closely-related act of bringing someone back from the dead another.

Dumbledore slowly nodded. "You did attack Mr Malfoy and Professor Snape, didn't you?"

"Snape attacked me first, Headmaster; please don't forget that. I did nothing more than defend myself." I know I just admitted to it, but I was acting in self-defense and so I wasn't really worried.

"That's Professor Snape," he corrected me automatically.

"You're assuming he continues to be a professor," I returned a little more sharply than I had intended. "I may have been a little rash in what I did, because who's to say what removing a Dark Mark does to a person, but he's a bad person so I don't feel badly about what I did."

Actually, I knew he would need to search for a new Defense professor as Snape would be unable to teach anymore. At the time, it seemed that the best way to remove the Dark Mark was to remove the magic that supported it. Of course that raised the question of whether that made Snape a Squib or a Muggle. I found it amusing that I had turned all the Purebloods that had joined Riddle into the very thing they hated most.

"What did you do to him?" Dumbledore tiredly asked. "Or what do you think your actions did to him?"

"I think we'll have to wait and see. The important thing to remember is that he'll no longer have a Dark Mark influencing him, so if he's still a great greasy git to everyone, then that is his real personality. At least

I didn't kill him," I pointed out. That seemed to mollify the old man somewhat.

While Dumbledore continued to stare at me and try to figure out what to say next, I distracted him with, "Oh, and I can remove the curse on the Defense position so teachers can stay longer than a year. It's really a Voodoo spell and I'll do that as soon as you get a good teacher."

He shook his head, looking very disappointed that I had placed a condition on my help. "And Mr Malfoy?"

"Excuse me?" I wasn't sure what Malfoy had to do with Snape and the man's position.

"What of the attack on Mr Malfoy on the train?" he pressed, probably trying to see if I would admit to anything here.

"Malfoy has insulted and attacked my friends and me multiple times over the last five years, and by that I mean that he initiated them. If Fate should return some of that to him in some way," I said, admitting nothing, "I won't shed any tears." Of course, as a person with no magic, he won't be in Hogwarts any longer, I thought with a mental smile.

I notice the twinkle in Dumbledore's eye had yet to come back. I suspect anything else I have to say to him today would not help it to return.

"How did this happen, Harry? How did you get all of this power?"

I saw him glance at Ginny, obviously wondering if she knew. I quickly threw my mind-shield charm around her, knowing that would stop Legilimency attacks. I really should have done that earlier. Dumbledore probably wouldn't attack her that way, but one never knew. She and I were going to have to learn real Occlumency some day.

Fortunately for me, I had expected this question to come from him one day, so I was prepared. "Funny you should ask that, Headmaster.

You see, shortly after you sent me back to the Dursleys this last summer, you know the ones, my loving relatives who forced me to live in a cupboard for ten years, starved me half the time, and never bought me anything?" I enjoyed twisting that knife ... again.

"Yes, Harry, I'm familiar with them," he said with a little exasperation leaking out.

"Well, my loving uncle was forcing me to work in the back garden as a thunderstorm came. During that time, I was struck by lightning. When I realized I wasn't dead, I went into the house and my loving uncle tried to hit me for bringing mud in the back door of the house. He went flying into the wall when I thought about defending myself, and that opened my eyes to the new me. I can tell you that gave me a lot of new confidence and a new outlook on life. No longer was I a whipping boy for people who hate me for no real reason, insult me for no real reason, or who try to manipulate me." I looked right at him.

Dumbledore didn't blink. He was good, I thought, but then again he was over 150.

"From there, life became a lot easier since they could no longer harass me physically. Instead, about the only bad thing they could do to me was to stop bringing food into the house." I looked down and smiled at Ginny. "But that was a fortuitous event as it caused Ginny to write me a letter and me to realize what a wonderful and pretty girl was right in front of me."

Ginny gave me a bright smile and stretched up a few inches to brush my cheek with her lips, apparently not caring that Dumbledore was right there. If she didn't care, I didn't either.

When I looked back at him, Dumbledore acted as if her kiss had never happened, which I did appreciate. "Since that was early in the summer, how did you spend your summer, Harry?"

"Well, I fixed my bedroom up so it was comfortable for the first time and then I usually spent the mornings and afternoons studying, practicing simple spells, and even a little sun bathing."

He smiled at the last one.

"In the evenings, I normally spent an hour or three with Ginny so we could get to know one another better." I was so proud of myself for not blushing. A glance showed Ginny had kept her blush to a faint pink tinge.

Dumbledore now looked puzzled. "But, Miss Weasley was at Grimmauld Place for the summer."

"Yes, she was," I casually agreed, waiting for him to put it together and see how little control he had over me.

A bushy white eyebrow crooked up. "You went to Grimmauld Place."

I smiled. "That was far easier than Ginny coming to me. Besides, I found out that I own the place." The obvious hit me and I felt stupid for not realizing it sooner. "Hey, that means I can stay there from now on. I don't have to find a flat to rent." When a determined look came over Dumbledore, I cut him off. "No, I'm never returning to the Dursleys. I have the power to protect myself, as you've seen today. Plus, all the people you had to keep me safe from are no longer a danger. And let's not forget that the blood wards no longer exist either."

He couldn't refute that and, I thought, wisely didn't try. "How did you travel to see Miss Weasley?"

"I assume you're worried that someone saw me at the time?"

He nodded.

With a mischievous grin, I stood and pulled Ginny up. Holding her hand, I said, "Like this." I thought of the spot that should be in front of where Hermione was, assuming she was still in the Great Hall, and transported us there. I really wished I could see the look on his face after we had left.

A second later, we "dropped" into the Great Hall. We had been gone for well over half an hour, but it had apparently taken quite some time

to restore order in the large eating room before breakfast could continue. I was extremely pleased to not only see Hermione on the other side of the table facing us, but she was looking up at the time and watched us appear. The fork that was halfway to her mouth fell out of her hand.

I glanced at Ginny and saw that she was as amused as I felt. "Good one, Harry," she whispered. I was thrilled that she approved of my prank.

"Bloody hell!" Ron shouted into the now mostly silent hall, as everyone was looking at us.

Hermione was still frozen, but her eyes were starting to move a little. I assumed she was trying to come up with a reasonable answer for what she had just witnessed.

"How did you get here?" Ron asked understandably, his mouth being free of food for once.

"I Apparated us here." I'm not sure how I kept a straight face when I said that, but I did. Ginny seemed to easily manage her innocent look and she nodded slightly in confirmation too. Damn she was good!

That unfroze my bushy-headed friend. "Harry James Potter! You can not Apparate or Disapparate inside Hogwarts!"

"Then how did I suddenly get here, Hermione?" This was so evil of me, but it was also so fun.

She worried her lower lip for a moment. "I don't know," she said, very frustrated, "but I will find out how you did it."

"OK, have fun with that," I said with a big smile. Turning to Ginny, I asked, "Shall we try breakfast again?" At her nod, I helped her onto her seat and then sat beside her.

There was no doubt, having an insane amount of power was a lot of fun, not to mention really useful for Vanquishing Dark Lords with evil minions.



A/N: Harry has returned to school and set it right. He's also taken care of Voldemort and the Death Eaters. There's only a few loose ends to take care of.

Yes, please assume that Dumbledore did not come over to Privet drive to discuss who owned Grimmauld Place like in the book. Also assume that question was never an issue because Sirius made it so.

If all goes well, the concluding ch 3 will be posted next weekend.

## Chapter 3 - Epilogue

Three days later, Dumbledore stopped by at dinner and “requested” I come to his office immediately after I finished dinner. I had no idea what this was for and said as much when my friends asked about it. When I was finished eating, I looked up at the Head Table and Dumbledore saw me and nodded. I kissed Ginny and told her I’d see her later and then followed Dumbledore out of the Great Hall. Neither of us spoke during the trip to his office. I cast my mental protection spell on the way up the stairs.

With him behind his desk and me in a chair I magically made a little more comfortable, he gave me a very serious look. I noticed he did not offer me a candy. “Harry, Professor Snape woke up today and there is a very serious problem.”

I gave him a blank look and waited. I could guess what the problem was, but I was not going to play his guessing games.

When I didn’t answer, he continued. “Can you please explain what you did to him?”

“I removed his Dark Mark.”

“How?” His gaze bored into me, but I mentally shrugged it off.

“That is one of most interesting things about my new power. I have no idea how I do some things; it’s all done by instinct.” That was completely true. I didn’t know how I did it. I did know about the side-effects, but I wasn’t going to admit to that. I also anticipated his next question and asked Magic while he contemplated what to do next. I got back a negative, which I was happy with.

“Harry, I’d like you to come with me to visit Professor Snape and see what you can do for him.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do anything for him, Headmaster. I don’t have medical training and unless I know exactly what’s wrong with him, I couldn’t begin to fix it. All of that is assuming I’m capable of it and that I want to. I do have limits and Snape has not ever given me any

incentive to help him. My removing his Dark Mark was actually more for my benefit of not having to deal with someone influenced by Dark magic rather than for his benefit.”

Dumbledore looked disappointed in me, as he had been doing a lot lately. I didn’t care and passively sat there. “Harry, will you please accompany me and see if you can help him?”

I did appreciate that he asked rather than ordered. “I believe it to be a waste of time, but in the spirit of cooperation, I can waste a few minutes.”

“Thank you,” he said, ignoring my negativity. He got up and led me out of his office. Again, we didn’t talk during our journey.

In the hospital wing, Madam Pomfrey met us and led us over to a curtained-off area. There was a larger curtained-off area on the other side of the room. I assumed the three students who’d also had the Dark Mark were back there.

When we entered the smaller private area, Dumbledore put up a privacy charm. It was probably one of his better ideas, as I suspected the next few minutes to be quite lively.

Snape was propped up in bed, leaning against the headboard. Other than looking quite upset, which wasn’t all that unusual for him, he looked positively normal. Well, he was dressed in a hospital gown rather than his normal black, but that was normal when staying in here.

“Potter!” he spat.

“Snivillus!” I spat back. I could return anything he threw at me.

“Harry! Please behave.” Dumbledore tried to stop the war between Snape and me.

“Given the way he addressed me, I thought that’s how he preferred to be addressed. Was I incorrect in that assumption?” I calmly asked, the abrupt change of my tone taking Pomfrey by surprise. “I’ve

already explained to you that I won't take anything bad from him any more. I'll be as civil as he is -- or not."

Dumbledore took a deep breath. It was obvious he didn't like this situation, but he was the one who had created it, or at least had allowed it over the last five years. "Poppy, could you please explain to Harry Severus's condition so he can correct it."

"I won't have him doing anything to me," Snape strenuously objected.

"And I don't want to do anything to you, not to mention, it's also quite possible I can't correct your condition anyway," I shot back at him. I received a glare, but he did stop arguing.

After a moment and a nod from Dumbledore, Pomfrey cleared her throat. "Professor Snape is in relatively good condition physically, other than being a little weak, which rest will fix. The problem is that, well," she paused as if trying to decide how to be delicate, while Snape seemed be grinding his teeth. "It seems that his magical exhaustion is not going away."

I looked at her and decided to continue to play dumb. "Since you can do a sleeping spell as well as I can, I would guess rest won't fix that."

"No."

"Then I believe I need more information. In different words, what's wrong?" I continued with my "dumb" look.

Pomfrey was still very hesitant looking, but she finally blurted out, "His magic is gone and it's not coming back. It's as if he's a Squib."

A slow grin came over me as I heard that. I would enjoy telling that to all of my friends.

Snape, however, looked so angry he was turning red and maybe even heading towards a light purple, just like my so-called uncle. Considering his normally sallow complexion, I thought that was a real feat.

“And you want me to do what, exactly?” I asked.

Dumbledore answered instead of Pomfrey. “I want you to ask Magic how to correct the problem, Harry.”

I shrugged and pretended to look thoughtful, since I had already done this. After about half a minute, I came back to the present. “Does he still have his magical core?” Pomfrey shook her head. “Then I’m sorry, but once a magical core has left a body, it’s gone.” Doing my very best to keep a straight face, I asked, “So, I guess we’ll be getting a new Defense teacher?” Dumbledore had been covering for the last few days.

“Potter! I’ll get you for this!” Snape yelled at me.

“You do realize I probably saved your life by doing this, right?” I calmly asked, trying to infuriate him a little with my Dumbledore-like manner.

Dumbledore shot me a piercing look. “What do you mean by that?” Surprisingly to me, Snape didn’t yell and even looked a little interested in my answer, along with his still-towering anger.

“Well, I can’t be sure as I didn’t really take the time to try to fully understand the Dark Mark and the one who can tell us won’t ever be waking up, but there was something like a thread leading away from the Mark itself. It seems quite likely that if Riddle was to die, it would take all of Death Eaters with him, sort of as the ultimate in ensuring loyalty.” I wasn’t totally sure of that, but there was something in the Dark Mark I didn’t understand and that might have been it. Whether it was true or not, it sounded like a great “CYA” answer.

Snape’s complexion went beyond sallow to white. Apparently he had never thought of that.

“So, if you want, you can think of that as my one good deed for you, Snape. Don’t expect any others.”

Dumbledore sighed with great exasperation. "If you would like to stay, Severus, you may continue to teach Potions. Horace doesn't really want to be here and he can go, now that it's safer."

I couldn't help it; I chuckled. I received three glares. "What? You don't see what's going to happen if you do that?" Their lack of seeing the obvious was astounding.

"Please explain," Dumbledore commanded. It was kindly said, but a command nevertheless. All three of them gave me their rapt attention.

"I thought it would be obvious. Snape has very carefully and thoroughly made an enemy of every student who is not in Slytherin. The first time he calls any Muggle-born a Mudblood, calls one of us a dunderhead, or assigns detention unfairly, someone is going to pull a wand on him and then it's all over. In fact, I might as well start a betting pool now as to who it'll be and how long it will take," I said with a grin.

"But he's a professor," Pomfrey objected, just like Hermione would have.

"As I said," my smile not wavering, "he's made a lot of enemies because of his childish actions and antagonistic treatment of students." After a slight pause, I quietly added, "Which someone did not prevent."

Snape exploded and started yelling. Dumbledore got his "exasperated and disappointed" look again. Pomfrey gave me a "deer in the headlights" look, but it was obvious she was thinking through what I said. At least one of them was showing signs of intelligence, I thought.

"Madam Pomfrey," I said with a nod to her before I turned and walked away. As far as I was concerned, I was done with the Death Eaters.

It seemed that Dumbledore actually took what I said to heart. Snape left the school a week later. To many people's surprise, Remus Lupin returned as the Defense professor. I would need to talk to Lupin about whether or not he wanted me to lift the curse that Riddle had

placed on the position so that he could stay for more than a year. I don't know how Dumbledore had managed to get Lupin back after he was sent away at the end of my third year, but a little of my respect returned for the old man.

To almost everyone's relief, Draco Malfoy, Theo Nott, and Zach Smith also left the school. It was amazing how much the school calmed down without them here. Life at Hogwarts wasn't Utopia, but very few people tried to start fights any more and the number of useless insults also decreased dramatically. A few new inter-house friendships also started up.

As I rode the Hogwarts Express home at the end of my sixth year, there was a nice symmetry in that Ginny was on my lap, just like she had on the train ride back in September. Luna was beside us, while Ron, Hermione, and Neville sat on the other bench. It wasn't difficult to notice that Ron and Hermione were sitting a little closer than normal. They still hadn't started dating, but it was starting to look more likely.

While the others talked, I listened with one ear and thought about what I had done at Christmas and how that would affect my summer to come.

Over the Yule break, I had returned to #12 Grimmauld Place and looked over the whole thing very carefully. Structurally, it was in sound shape. The inside was still depressing and in need of major renovation. So I called Kreacher and we had a heart-to-heart talk.

After I established my position as Master of the House and laid down the law about what he could and could not say, I explained to the poor thing how I wanted us get along and restore the Black house and name to its former glory. It took a while but I finally made him see the light -- mostly. I knew that it would take many months to fully convince him, but I planned to try.

Now that we were on the right footing, I got him to show me where the ward stone for the house was. He took me into the basement and revealed it. Sirius had left me a short letter telling me how to claim the

house as its owner, so I did. I felt the wards of the house tie themselves to me and it was incredible.

The next thing I did, as owner of the house, was take Dumbledore's Fidelius charm down. The house was already Unplottable and a few other things, and that would stop most people. I then added a few more wards that were almost as good as a Fidelius. I wasn't ready to cast a real Fidelius because I wasn't sure who I wanted as my Secret Keeper. Still, the existing wards and the few new ones I added would make the house very hard to find and if someone managed it anyway and then tried to get in, well, let's just say they might have a very short day. Lastly, I keyed Hermione, Neville, Luna, Remus, the three Tonks, and all the Weasleys -- except for Percy who was still being a git to his family -- into the wards so they could find the place and knock on the door without any unpleasant surprises.

Back upstairs, I made the Floo restricted, except for Ginny. As soon as I could remodel so the Floo was in a separate room with a lockable door, I'd remove the restriction for my friends and family. As much as I loved Molly, I didn't want her to be able to Floo in unannounced. It would be bad if I was "busy" with someone -- such as her daughter.

Then before I returned to the Burrow, where I was staying for Christmas, I gave Kreacher some money and told him to start redecorating the place and cleaning it out one room at a time. His goal was to put Dark items he found in a trunk for me and then restore the room to its former glory. When he finished each room, he was to come tell me so I could inspect it and then start him on the next room after we discussed it.

It was amazing what the right motivation could do for the barmy house-elf. Every week or two, he'd pop into Hogwarts and let me know he had finished a new room. I'd transport myself home in the evenings and look. He did good work when he wanted to and the transformation of the house was amazing. I'd give him a day off and then point out the next room. He had finished the basement, ground floor, first floor, as well as the front of the house by the end of the school year. I could hardly wait to see it all together and show it off to Ginny.



“Harry! Mate! Hello, anyone home?” Ron’s query broke me out of my reminiscing.

“Yeah?”

“I was asking when you’d be coming over. Since you don’t need to stay with your relatives, I thought you could come over whenever you wanted and we could go flying. Yeah?” Ron looked anxious. I really didn’t know why as he got to fly quite a bit at school.

“Sure, I can come over tomorrow if you’d like.”

Ginny gave me a particular look that I knew so well. It was the one she always gave me when she was about to wind her brother up.

“You can come over this evening, Harry. You know my mother never minds if you join us for dinner. I’m sure I can find a good dessert for you, too,” she said coyly.

It was all I could do not to grin as I recognized what she was doing, and I was happy to go along. “Hmm, your mother is a great cook. I’d be daft for turning down her cooking for dinner and then having you for dessert.”

While I was staring lovingly into her face, I could see Ron go red out of the corner of my eye. “H-Harry!” he loudly sputtered. “That’s my sister you’re talking about!”

Turning my head, I could see a slight smile on Luna’s usually placid face. A glance the other direction showed Hermione and Neville doing their best to hold their amusement in. Everyone but Ron knew we did this purpose. He’d learn some day.

“Why, I do believe you’re right, Ron. She does look just like your sister.” I couldn’t hold my grin in any longer. Ginny gave me a quick kiss and then wiggled a little to get comfortable again. She was such a minx and I loved her for it. I was starting to give serious consideration to making her my Secret Keeper if I put a Fidelius up around my house.

It was almost certain I'd have to completely hide my house one day. Fortunately for me, the knowledge that I was a Mage had been kept out of the newspaper and hadn't spread too far yet, but I was certain my status would become well known over summer as all the students told their parents about it. One of them was bound to tell the Daily Prophet.

Hermione's chuckle turned into a sigh. "I wished it was as easy for me to come visit."

Now it was my turn to sigh. "Hermione, you do realize you're already seventeen, right? You can Apparate over any time you like."

She blinked at me, much like Hedwig would have done, before she started to chuckle, the rest of us joining her. "I can't believe I overlooked something so simple. I guess it's just habit of thinking I can't easily come over." A very pleased look came over her. "My parents will be happy that I can come over and spend the day with you but be back every evening to spend time with them." Hermione then looked at me. "Harry, are you going to get an Apparation license?"

I shrugged. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt, but since I don't really Apparate, they can't say anything about it."

Hermione looked at me a little sourly. "I still don't understand how you get around. Even doing various revealing spells while you're transporting didn't tell me anything useful. And the wards ... you go right through them all."

Ginny chuckled. "If you had as much power as Merlin, you could probably do it too, Hermione." That did not help the brunette as the rest of us chuckled with Ginny.

We soon arrived back at King's Cross. Getting off the train, I noticed that the chair that I'd conjured on the train platform at the beginning of the year was still there and looking as good as new. I found that amusing and turned to find the rest of the Weasleys. Ginny, who was holding my hand, found her parents first and led us over.

Mrs Weasley gave both of us a big hug. Mr Weasley gave Ginny a hug and he and I shook hands.

"I'm so glad to see all three of you," Mrs Weasley said to her two children and me.

"Mum, may Harry come over for dinner?" Ginny asked.

"Of course, dear." The matron looked at me. "You may come over any time you want, dear. In fact, you may come over every night." She said it as if she thought I'd starve otherwise. I smiled as did Ginny.

"Thank you, Mrs Weasley. I'll be over about six then. After dinner, you're welcome to come over to my house for a tour. Kreacher has remodeled the bottom three floors."

"Why, thank you, Harry. That would be lovely. I'd like to see what's been done to the place since we were there last summer." She was all smiles, but I wondered if she also wanted to see how I'd be living. She knew I'd be mostly on my own with only Remus checking in on me from time to time. I knew she wasn't happy with that, but I knew that she knew she couldn't do a thing about it.

"Very good, I'll see you at six." With a smile, I gave my girlfriend a quick peck on the cheek and transported home. I was quite sure I'd be hearing about that later, but it could be a fun argument. Make-up snogging was a lot of fun.

Arriving home, I called for Kreacher and he popped in.

"Welcome home, Master."

I didn't like him to call me Master, but it was one of the compromises I made to get him to act nearly normal. "Thank you, Kreacher. Here's my trunk, if you could put it in my bedroom please." I handed him the shrunken trunk from my pocket. "I won't be home for dinner, but most of the Weasleys will be joining me for tea between eight and nine. A light dessert would be appropriate."

“Yes, Master.”

“As you were then, I’ll take a tour and then I shall be off to the Weasleys for dinner.”

Kreacher bowed and left.

I took my tour and was mostly happy with what I saw; the house was only missing one important thing. Seeing the house fixed up really helped me to understand how much Kreacher fought with Sirius, doing absolutely as little as possible.

At six, I transported myself to the Weasley’s back porch. Ginny was waiting for me on the swing with a smile. I smiled as I strode over to her and we kissed -- deeply.

Since we had a moment, I held her tightly and looked into her eyes. “Ginny,” I breathed her name. “Are you truly happy with us?”

She nodded. “Truly. And you?”

I couldn’t stop the smile. “Truly.” I kissed her again.

“Why do you ask?” There was something in her look or voice that I couldn’t quite place.

I almost blurted out my deepest feeling right then, but I managed not to. I wasn’t the right time or place. But there was another thing I could tell her. “Because I want you to know that I’ve finally figured out what love is and, well, I love you very much.” Somehow, her smile got bigger just before she attacked my lips.

We were in the middle of probably the best snog of my life when Ron’s voice called out. “Hey! If you two will leave each others’ virtue intact, you can come in and eat. Hey! That hurt!”

“Ronald Weasley! I can’t believe you said that about them!” his mother yelled, clearly heard despite the fact that she was in the house and we were outside.

Ginny and I both pulled back from the kiss laughing. It was a good thing we were holding on to one another, we were laughing that hard. When we got a hold of ourselves, she told me, "I love you too, Harry," before she stood up on her tip-toes to give me a quick kiss as if to seal what she had told me.

We walked in arm-in-arm to find the entire family there, except for Charlie and Percy. Ron was sulking and rubbing his shoulder, but the rest of the brothers greeted me warmly.

Dinner went well. Mrs Weasley's food was as good as usual and I had a blast there. I think what made it so wonderful was being treated just like one of the family. Well, that and sitting next to Ginny.

After dinner, I told them all to take the Floo to "The House of Black" after about half a minute while I gave them temporary access. I threw a pinch of Floo Powder in and left. After giving them all access, Ginny came out first, followed by the twins, Ron, Bill, and then her parents with Mr Weasley being last.

Everyone looked amazed as they looked around at the spotless room that was decorated in a bright and cheery way, while also showing its luxurious roots as the Blacks might have had it. Ginny was having to fake it a little as I had already brought her here a few times during the school year and she'd already seen a few of the remodeled rooms, but she still enjoyed seeing all of the changes.

"I -- I can hardly believe it," Mrs Weasley said in a soft voice as she tried to take it all in.

Ron was speechless and I couldn't decide if that was good or not. Was he only amazed at the change, or was he going to show jealousy?

"Blimey --"

"Cor --"

The twins were their usual selves even when surprised.

Bill and Mr Weasley looked around very appreciatively. "Very nice, Harry," Bill said. "I like what you've done with it."

"Thanks Bill. Kreacher has really done all of the work. I only supervised."

"Kreacher? Seriously?" Mr Weasley asked.

"Yes. We've come to an agreement on how to live and work together. Come on, let me show you around and then we can sit down for some tea." I grabbed Ginny's hand and put it on my arm and led them around as a Head of House should. Ginny blushed a little as she played Mistress of the House. I liked the feeling of her being there, which continued a few of my previous ideas from earlier in the evening.

By the time the Weasleys left, with Ginny leaving a few minutes after everyone else, all of them were happy for me being here. I anticipated a wonderful summer.

I spent most of my seventeenth birthday in Gringotts. The goblins said it was their policy that no one could be down in the vault area unsupervised, so I took pleasure in keeping one of them sitting in the cart waiting on me for nearly five hours. It took me quite a while to go through everything in the Potter family vault. Most of the heirlooms only had sentimental value, but that made me treasure them all the more. There was plenty of gold there, but I ignored it all and concentrated on the items and papers.

Probably the most treasured find was a diary from my mother. It was mostly filled with the usual "girl things" about how a day went or how she was feeling about being in the magical world. In and of itself, useless information, except that it really helped me get to know her better. She had noted a few ideas about spells and potions there, but I'd look at those parts later. Sadly, my father left nothing similar.

I found one other item I really liked and stuck it in my pocket. I was starting to get an idea and I thought I'd want it soon, probably by the end of the year.

Just for fun, when the goblin was still in the cart and I was not in his line of sight, I tried to transport myself home from inside my vault. To my deep pleasure, it worked. I transported back and no alarms were going off and the goblin didn't seem to know that I'd been gone at all. With an evil smile, I decided that I might never officially visit Gringotts for a long time. I wondered how their accounting would show my taking my money out without them bringing me down to the vault.

After I returned home, I cleaned up and then went to The Burrow for dinner. Ginny had made it clear that I had to be there for my birthday party. I had a great time with everyone there. Hermione, Neville, and Luna joined the Weasleys.

One of the most amusing things was watching Hermione. I could see her practically bouncing and wanting to share her news with everyone, but she also was trying to hold back because it was a party for me. I finally decided to put her out of her misery for everyone's peace of mind. I really didn't want her exploding or something.

"So, Hermione," I started during a pause while we all sat around talking. "You look as if you know something special. Would you like to share?"

She gave me a look like I'd caught her with her hand in the biscuit jar. "I, uh, I don't want to spoil your fun, Harry."

"Nonsense. I'm having fun now and I'm sure I'll have more later. Go ahead," I encouraged her. "Ginny received some news too and she can go afterwards." My girlfriend gave me a shy but pleased smile. Her mother beamed; her pride showing to everyone.

"Well, if you insist," Hermione said as she reached into her pocket and pulled out a button. She didn't say anything; she just held up her button. It said "HG" on it in gold, unlike Prefect buttons that were in silver.

"Congratulations, Hermione. You got a button with your initials on it," I excitedly told her.

Her eyes narrowed for a brief moment as if going for a glare before she started smiling when she realized I was having her on. Everyone else called out their congratulations on her making Head Girl. While they were busy doing so, I pulled something out of my pocket.

"I just wished I knew who made Head Boy," she said. "I'd really like to know who I'll be working with."

I casually flicked the object in my hand her way. She caught it and gave it a look before she squealed and ran across the room to me to give me a hug.

"What?" Ron asked.

Neville had figured it out and gave me a salute. I returned a nod to my quiet friend. Luna was even quieter and just turned down the dreaminess for a moment along with a smile as congratulations.

I'd only told Ginny my news, and she had enthusiastically congratulated me. "I have the matching badge," I replied. With much playfulness, at least for Hermione, she acted like she was the queen and presented me with my badge that had "HB" on it. I took it back from her with a smile. Everyone congratulated me as well.

McGonagall had sworn me to secrecy and then told me that I was Head Boy only because she had forced Dumbledore to pick me. The old man had not been very happy with me for the last year. He didn't seem to like my "can do" attitude since I'd become a Mage, because my preferred direction was not his preferred direction for me.

"Ginny, your turn," I prompted her with a smile.

She smiled back at me. "Thanks to Harry's help, I got Exceeds Expectations on my Astronomy and History of Magic OWLs, and an Outstanding on everything else." I managed to kiss the top of her head just before Hermione was back over, giving Ginny a hug this time.

When everyone started to congratulate her on her OWL scores, I stopped them. "Hold on, Ginny has one more bit of news."



Ginny looked puzzled. "What? That was all that was in my letter, other than the form for what classes I want at the NEWT level."

"That's because this didn't come in an owl post. I took a few minutes today on my way home from the bank to stop by Hogwarts and talk to McGonagall..."

"Harry, only you could go from one side of London..."

"To the other side of London by way of Scotland."

Everyone laughed, as did I, but I mentally made a note to myself to one day get the twins to tell me how they talked like that.

"Yeah, well, it was easy enough to pop into her office. You should have seen the look on her face when I suddenly appeared. Well, and the fact that I had to pull a shield up to save myself from getting hexed." That drew more laughter, as I had intended. "Anyway, she told me who the Head Girl was and we talked about who was going to be the Quidditch captain." I pulled another badge out of my pocket and presented it to Ginny with a smile. "Here you go, Captain."

Her eyes lit up and she threw herself at me. I hugged her tightly and whispered, "You deserve it," in her ear.

As almost everyone finished clapping, Ron asked with a frown, "But, you were Captain last year, Harry. You should still be Captain."

"I was," I answered calmly, trying to keep him from exploding. "I'll be there to answer questions for Ginny, sort of as a trainer or unofficial assistant captain, but the real spot is hers. McGonagall and I decided that we all should start training replacements and I felt that included the captaincy since I would be busy being Head Boy. This gives Ginny the chance to learn the ropes and then be around to train someone a lot younger next year as she leads the team."

Ron nodded in understanding and I was happy he hadn't gotten angry. Perhaps I had been selling my friend short and he had grown up when I wasn't looking.

As the party wound down and people started to go home, I pulled Ginny outside and we walked in the back garden and into the orchard. There, I waved my hand and conjured a small settee for us to sit on.

“What?” she asked, able to tell that I wanted to talk about something important.

“I talked to McGonagall about a couple of other things.”

“Oh? Bad things?” she asked, like she hoped she was wrong.

I chuckled in the dim moonlight. “Mostly not. The best one is that I convinced her to strongly consider you for Head Girl next year. She has been already watching you to see about nominating you for it.”

“But, I haven’t been Prefect,” she protested.

“So, I wasn’t Prefect either. Being Head Boy or Girl is more about leadership than anything else. So you just need to be a leader with me this year and you’ll probably get it next year.”

“OK,” she drawled. “You make it sound like that’s important for some reason.”

“It is,” I told her with a grin. “The Head Boy and Girl have their own separate rooms. That will make visiting you a lot easier next year when I’m not at school. If you have your own room, then I can transport there and not be seen by anyone else.”

She raised her eyebrow in surprise and admiration. “I like your thinking, Harry.”

“Thanks, so do I. I’ll do you one better for this year. When we get to school, I’ll create a portal for you in your dorm room that will work only for you and will take you directly to my room,” I smirked.

Ginny chuckled. “It sounds like someone really wants me around.”

“Uh-hmm,” I vocalized as I started to kiss her, which she eagerly returned.

We broke after a few minutes. “I really like your ideas,” she breathlessly told me.

“Thanks. I hope you like my next one too.”

“Probably,” she lazily told me as she snuggled into my embrace. “What is it?”

“McGonagall told me that Dumbledore was out of the castle on Ministry business, so I went to his office and had a chat with the Sorting Hat.”

“Oh?”

“It was hard to figure out when it happened, but the Hat and I determined that Riddle put a spell on it when he came to try to get a job as the Defense teacher years ago. It was probably the same day he cursed the Defense professorship.”

Ginny shot up and looked at me very alarmed. “Bloody hell, you’re serious.”

I nodded slowly. “Riddle put a curse on the Hat to cause it to sort so as to cause less unity in the school. While the Hat has always been the one to announce the student’s house, the Hat was meant to advise the first-years on what house or houses would work well, but leave the final choice up to the student. By forcing the Hat to make the choice and to do so on very strict personality traits, it caused more cliques and less diversity within each house. In turn, that caused more strife between the houses and less unity in the school.”

“That’s ... wow. I don’t even know what to say. What did McGonagall say when you told her?”

I shrugged and pulled her back to me and let her settle in again. “The Hat and I agreed to not tell either her or Dumbledore. I’m only telling

you so you'll know what I did. I, uh, I need you to do something for me, Ginny."

"Sure, Harry, anything."

I snorted. "Don't say that."

She softly kissed my cheek. "I trust you not to ask for anything I can't give."

I could barely make out the brown of her eyes in the moonlight, but her trust and sincerity were easily visible on her face. "I wanted you to know because I need someone who will help keep me in check. I think I understand Dumbledore a little better now. I can now see that when a person has so much more power than anyone else, it would be easy to do things to people they don't want, yet thinking you're doing it for their own good all the while. I don't want to do that or be that way -- ever. I need you to keep watch over me and tell me when I'm wrong. I think that is Dumbledore's biggest problem. He's all alone and never really had anyone to tell him 'no' when he wanted to do something stupid."

Ginny quietly chuckled. "Only you, Harry, could call Dumbledore stupid and make it seem reasonable." She moved a little and kissed my cheek. "I'll be your conscience for as long as you'll let me, Harry."

I hugged her tightly. "Thank you, Ginny. You don't know how good that makes me feel."

"Try anyway," she said. There was a hint of mischievousness in her voice. It wasn't hard to figure out what she wanted. I kissed her for all I was worth for a while before I Vanished the settee and walked her back to the house.

The party had been wonderful, in more ways than one.

I felt incredibly nervous, almost to the point of about to being ready to hurl. I was presently making small talk with Mr Weasley about small electrical appliances while we passed the time waiting for Ginny.

It was New Year's Eve and in a few hours it would be 1998. I was dressed in warm clothes and my Christmas present from Ginny. She had bought some very nice material and then spent a little time here and there over the last few months creating a magnificent-looking cloak. Besides sewing it, she also put numerous charms on it for temperature control and protection. It also never wrinkled and dirt seemed to be unable to cling to it. She had done a truly masterful job.

By comparison, my present of a half-Kneazle with all the accessories seemed almost inconsiderate. Ginny loved cats, but still, I almost felt like a cad. She told me she loved the kitten and it was a great present, but I really wasn't so sure. On the other hand, I had planned this special date tonight for over a month and I hoped that would make up for my apparent lack of thoughtfulness in presents.

A mostly black little kitten with a few white spots came bounding into the room. I smiled as Ginny walked in a moment later. She was dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt, just like me. However, she looked a lot nicer than I ever would. That gorgeous red hair, cute face, and blinding smile helped a lot. Well, if I have to be honest, she did have a few curves that I really appreciated as well.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Almost, let me get my cloak."

"No need," I told her and motioned her over. A flick of my hand caused my cloak to be double its original width. I held it out and she stepped to my side with another smile as I wrapped my cloak around her, too.

I felt a hand fall on my shoulder and squeeze. Looking up, I saw Mr Weasley give me a knowing smile. "You two have fun this evening." He lightly kissed Ginny on the forehead and then left for the kitchen, where his wife was doing something that made a lot of noise.

Pulling Ginny to me, I thought very carefully about where I wanted to go and transported us there. I had only been here once and that was during the day. At night, it was everything I had wanted. It was twelve days until the next full moon, so there was only a tiny crescent near

the horizon. Between that and the cloudless sky, the stars looked magnificent.

"It's beautiful," Ginny breathed as she looked around.

She also shivered despite the wonderful cloak around us. I magically created a barrier around us that blocked all the cutting wind; we still felt the cold in the air and stood in crunching snow, but now we had a chance to be cozy on this mountain top with a little magical help.

"Where are we?" Her head was still swiveling, taking in the brilliant stars above us. As our eyes adjusted to the dark, the outlines of other mountains could be seen around us.

I turned us a little to the left and pointed down. "See that glow down there? That's Hogwarts."

"You mean we're in the mountains above it?"

"Uh-huh," I mumbled into her ear as I pulled her closer, wrapping my arms around her underneath the cloak.

We both stood there and enjoyed nature and each other for a few minutes.

"Why are we here?" she finally asked.

I had wondered how long it would take her. Apparently, she was as caught up in the beauty of the place as I was. My hand came out of the cloak and waved. In front of us, a roaring fire surrounded by stones appeared. Another wave conjured a thick quilt over the ground. "Now let's see if Kreacher found what I asked for." Another wave caused a small cauldron on a tripod to appear, with two small tankards hanging from it as well. Looking in the cauldron, I saw a liquid and smiled. "Success."

Sitting her down, I drew two drinks before I put the tripod near the fire and sat down with her, arranging my cloak around us again. Very carefully, Ginny moved over and sat in my lap. A wave of my hand

put a warm boulder behind me to lean against. We were warm, cozy, and in a lovely spot. I couldn't ask for much more.

Ginny took a sip from the tankard I had handed her. "A spiced wine?"

"I'm told it's good for cold evenings." Remus had suggested it when I told him of my plans. I guess being a former Marauder was good for thinking about little details.

"I have to admit, Harry, this was not what I expected when you told me you wanted to take me on a date on New Year's Eve."

"Hmm, how should I take that?" I asked lightly, hoping for the best.

She moved a few inches and softly kissed me on the cheek. "It's a very nice and romantic surprise, Harry. I like having you to myself and a date under starry skies is always good."

I couldn't suppress the grin I had after I heard that. "Splendid. Part one of the mission has been accomplished."

"Part one?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Taking you to a romantic place." With a little concentration, I levitated both of our tankards to the side, out of hitting and kicking range. "Part two is to give you the other half of your Christmas present."

Now her both of her eyebrows rose. "Wait a minute, you had another present and you didn't give it to me?" she asked impishly. I could tell she was teasing me, but it was one of the things I liked about her. We never stayed serious for too long.

I nodded to her. "This didn't really cost me anything as I found it in my family vault with a number of other things, but it does have sentimental value and I thought you would like it."

Her teasing look melted. "Harry, I can't take anything from your family like that."

"I really don't see it as you taking from my family, Ginny." I reached into my pocket and grasped it in my hand. Despite the fact that the warm wine had helped to settle my stomach and that I wasn't cold, my hand still shook a little. Damn my nerves!

Holding out my hand in a fist with my curled fingers up, I told her, "Your father said I could give you this." I uncurled my fingers and heard Ginny gasp as she saw what was sitting in my palm.

"Harry?" she weakly called out, as if she was about to have a panic attack.

There was no stopping now; I had to go forward. "Ginny, I love you so much. Will you marry me?" I prayed she said yes.

Ginny didn't say a word. That worried me for the brief moment until she held out her left hand, a hand that shook just like mine. With a sigh of relief, I slid the ring on her hand. She admired it for a moment before a squeal of joy burst from her and she bowled me over.

The anti-wrinkle charms on my cloak got a real workout as she wiggled on top of me and kissed me for all she was worth. Her hands ran all over my face and head. I just grasped her sides and tried to hold on and enjoy the moment.

Quite some time and lots of snogging later, we were laying side-by-side, heads near the slowly dying fire, staring at one another. Ginny would look down to her hand from time-to-time and smile. I had the impression she was reassuring herself that this was real.

"I guess I won't need to worry about Dean any longer," I said cryptically as I propped myself up on one elbow.

"Why? What does Dean have to do with anything?"

I pulled her hand up and kissed her knuckles. "At the beginning of last year, when everyone first found out about us dating, Dean told me that he had some interest in you. He then asked me to let him know if I ever stopped dating you so he could ask you out."



Ginny chuckled as she moved a little to the side to get closer to me, making it so I was sort of leaning over her. "I'm glad you sent your first letter when you did and that I didn't send my letter to Dean, or there's no telling how long it would have been before we got together."

"Yeah, that would have caused a major delay." I looked at her semi-seriously. "If that had happened, do you think we still would have gotten together afterward? Or do you think we each may have moved on and not given us a chance?"

Ginny snorted. "Oh please, Harry. I've always been waiting on you. I had to be patient while you figured girls out, but you were always in my sights." She blew me a kiss with her lips. "Now, it's possible we might have dated a while and then decided we were better off as friends, but we were always going to date at some time."

"You sound very sure," I asked teasingly, while I wondered if she really thought I had figured girls out. I didn't think I had.

"I'm as sure of that as I am that you're going to kiss me and then take me home because it's getting very late."

When I hesitated, she reached up and pulled my head down. I mentally laughed at her getting her way while I kissed her. Wanting a few more kisses before I took her home, I put my hand on her side to pull her the last few inches to me, except that she was too heavy for the position I was in. So I let my magic out a little and my blue hand momentarily lightened her before I pulled her over so she was pressed into me. I enjoyed feeling her warm body next to mine and I did my best to keep my thoughts from going further, at least while she was with me.

Ginny started to giggle and then laugh. "Harry, stop! That tickles!" she gasped.

I looked down and saw that my hand was still blue, so my magic was still active and running over my skin. I'd touched her hand when my magic was active a few times before and she said it tingled in a good

way. I'd even massaged her back and neck a few times with my magic active and she said those were the best massages ever.

Letting my magic go inactive, I sheepishly told her, "Sorry."

She blushed a little as she looked right into my eye. "That was just a bad spot, Harry. Now, if you want to touch me a little higher and on the front, I think I'd like to experience that at least once."

My imagination went into high gear as I realized what she said. "You mean I can touch you ..."

"You can now -- fiancé priviledges."

I thought that through. "So I was allowed to touch your bum because of, uh, boyfriend priviledges?"

Ginny gave me a cute smile and a nod.

Slowly, I moved my hand from her side around to her stomach and then I started moving it lower. She quickly caught my wrist before my hand had travelled very far. "Uh-uh," she told me playfully. "It takes husband priviledges to get in there."

I couldn't help it, I laughed. It was all stated so strangely and yet, it made sense. I moved my hand back to her side and she let go. "All right," I easily agreed and leaned down to kiss her, which led to several more very long kisses.

When she again reminded that it was getting late, I reversed all of my magic at our little campsite so the natural setting was restored, sent to the extra things back to my house, and then I took her home.

We were very quiet and careful when I took her back to The Burrow (landing in the living room) because we realized it was almost three in the morning. Fortunately, the house was dark, which we took as meaning everyone was in bed. With some luck, she'd be able to get to bed with no one the wiser. So I transported her straight to her room.

It was only my command of magic that saved us. Our landing in her room set off fireworks and only the twins knew what else. I had to hand it to them; it was inventive. Two waves of my hands froze all magical items and silenced the room after a mere half-second. My whole body was lit in my blue flaming aura from expending so much magic so quickly.

Ginny lit her wand to give us a more normal light and it was amazing as to how many traps were set up. There was also a note on her bed. She picked it up and read it to me.

Ginny,

Dad says this was a special evening for you. Even though he didn't say why, we thought we'd help you celebrate. Congratulations!

TTFN

"I am going to kill them!" she fiercely whispered.

"You can have the second shot. Let me take care of this stuff. I'll see you tomorrow."

"I love you, Harry." She molded herself to me for a good-night kiss. I almost didn't want to leave after that.

"I love you too, Ginny."

I resized my cloak back to its normal size so I could now work properly. Concentrating on all of the prank stuff, I gathered it with my magic and transported to a certain popular shop in Diagon Alley. There, I set about putting all the things I had brought from Ginny's room around the shop and to not go off until after both twins were in the room. I also added a few things of my own, just to show them who they were messing with. I was very pleased with the disillusioned Portable Swamp behind the cash register. The last thing I did before going home was to disillusion the rest of the equipment.

As I was about to transport out, I had a cunning idea. I put a camera in a corner and spelled it to take pictures if both twins were in their

shop. When it finished its long roll of film, it would send itself to my house. Even more pleased with myself than before, I went home and dreamed of a redhead and lots of children. It had been a glorious evening.

The next day I think I almost broke a few ribs laughing. Kreacher had found the camera on the kitchen table and developed the film. I thanked him profusely and went straight to The Burrow. After I was hugged practically to death by Mrs Weasley, who was ecstatic at Ginny's new status as my fiancée, I showed the photos around. Everyone there laughed themselves silly at Fred and George's expense. It was a great holiday.

I was in the Gryffindor common room after the Leaving Feast. Tomorrow, four of us would leave Hogwarts for the last time as students.

Ron seemed to be the happiest of us all for that. Personally, I think Ron was still a little "off" after taking his NEWTs. He had been knocked unconscious during the practical portion of the Defense NEWT and I wasn't sure he was completely recovered.

Neville was the most calm, but then again he had nice job lined up to help grow things for potions.

Hermione was a basket case. I'd had to hit her with a Calming charm several times during the last few weeks while the NEWTs were going on. Just as with the OWLs, she was still trying to discuss the questions after all the tests were done and none if it made any difference.

I knew what I was going to do for a job, but I was mildly depressed. As of next September, I'd be separate from my fiancée for most of ten months before we were to get married the summer after she finished school.

We sat around talking mostly about school, but a little about the future too.

“Harry, it won’t be so bad,” Ginny whispered in my ear when the others were discussing the latest stupid thing out of the Ministry.

I leaned over and kissed her temple. “So you won’t miss that for ten months, except for holidays and the occasional Quidditch game I come to visit you for?” I whispered back.

She had the audacity to roll her eyes at me. “Harry, you’re a Mage, remember? Or did those NEWTs cook your brain?”

Ideas started going through my head as she mentioned my magical status. “I’ve been stupid, haven’t I?”

She was nice and only nodded. “This was why you lobbied for me to be Head Girl, so I’d have my own room. Right?”

I couldn’t help the sheepish look. “Er, right ... sorry.”

She grinned impishly. “We also still have the magic mirrors, so we can always set up times for you to visit me.”

Damn it! I hated it when I overlooked the obvious, or in this case, forgot my plans. I saw the others were still engrossed in their conversation, so I continued our whispered conversation. “So, you and me, and a week on the beach at the French Riviera should cure me.”

Her eyes sparkled. “I’d love that, Harry, but my mother would never let me go alone with you.”

“How about you say you’re going to Aunt Muriel’s for a week and I kidnap you on the way?”

Ginny laughed and the others looked at us. She looked at me like I had to explain.

“Er, nothing important, just a little negotiation about summer plans.” That was apparently the wrong thing to say and they became even more attentive. So I waved my hand and Ginny and my voices became silent to them. “There, they can’t hear us now. So, what if I

say I'm going there, and you can tell your mother that you need to go to protect me from all the French witches? Or Veela, yeah, tell her you need to protect me from the Veela."

Ginny was now laughing so hard she was starting to cry. I gave up and looked at the others. Hermione looked put out for being excluded. The other two were smiling at her. I momentarily gave up my summer holiday trip plans and canceled the silencing charm.

I was puttering around in the little shop right next to the big "Triple W" in Diagon Alley. It had been easy to buy since it was empty. My sign, "Enchanted and Charmed" hung out front, along with an "Opening Soon" sign.

Inside, I was putting a few more things on the shelves for those who wanted to take something with them, instead of having custom work done. For the serious potion-makers and mothers of young children who had little time, various sizes of self-stirring cauldrons. I had auto-chopping knives, guaranteed to chop things very consistently so all work was the same size. For the Muggle-born and Half-blood raised, I had a dozen or so electronic devices that had a tightly contained Null-Magic field around them, guaranteed to work even in magic-heavy environments like Hogwarts. Other convenience items were also displayed.

Of course, the real gravy was in custom work, whether enchanting objects or coming up with new spells for people. I charged a lot for this and it wasn't hard -- for me, as I was a Mage.

The real problem was doing this without everyone and their kneazle knowing I was Harry Potter. Between my two victorious encounters with Riddle, I always had to screen my mail and I rarely went out in public without a disguise. I was going to need to disguise myself here, too. When I was running the shop, I would look something like Bill, redheaded and older. I really freaked Ginny out the first time she saw me like that.

Slim arms and hands encircled my waist, bringing me out of my thoughts. I turned in the embrace and kissed Ginny. She was still as

cute as ever, although her hair was now a shade lighter due to time in the sun. I had gotten my week on the beach, but the cost had been to take Ron and her parents. To keep Ron occupied and not tagging along with Ginny and me, I also talked Hermione into going. It had been a good decision, especially since Ron finally asked Hermione on a date while there. I still didn't understand why she liked him like that.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

I looked at the clock and saw that it was nine in the morning, on the day I had advertized to open, the 24th of July, a week before my birthday. I nodded as I waved my hands a few times, creating Adam and Eve O'Donald. We both now looked thirtyish and a little different than our normal selves. Ginny had objected to being called Eve, but I liked it as I saw us as the first of my family.

Ginny/Eve opened the door and she was practically shoved backwards by the crowd rushing in. I quickly threw up a spell to limit visitors to ten families at a time. That upset a few people but the store was very small. To try to settle everyone, I conjured a small sign explaining the limit and posted it on the door.

Once she recovered, Ginny hurried to the check-out counter on the other side of the door while I, as Adam, walked around the store and helped people. I was amused when ten minutes after the store was opened, Justin Finch-Fletchley walked up to me holding a portable CD player.

"Sir, I noticed that you don't have many disks for these," he brandished the player. "Do you plan to get more?"

I smiled. "I'm sorry, but I don't plan to be a music store. I carry a few popular ones so you can have something to play now, but we specialize in making the player work while around magic. There is nothing special to be done for the CD."

"So I can go buy them anywhere?"

“My thought was that only those wizards and witches who knew what it was and where to get CDs would buy the player,” I patiently explained.

Justin snorted. “You mean those with a Muggle background.”

I smiled. “My wife is from a Pureblood family and knows what they are, but I’ll grant you that she’s probably an exception. I know I think of her as exceptional.” I winked at the last part.

Justin chuckled. “OK, thanks.”

I watched him grab a second player and wondered if a younger brother or sister of Justin’s would be going to Hogwarts this year. Justin also grabbed several packages of batteries before getting in line to purchase his selections.

A glance at Ginny showed her to be working as fast as she could. At the moment, she was taking Pounds Sterling from a man, probably a Muggle-born, I thought. I had a sign saying that the store took both Muggle and Wizarding money. The Muggle money was used to purchase the items in the Muggle world, and allowed me to avoid the conversion fees the goblins charged to go from Galleons to Pounds.

“Excuse me?” a female voice called.

I turned to see another familiar face and smiled at her. “Yes?”

“I’ve always wanted to have a scientific calculator at school for Arithmancy, but all I see are the simple four-function calculators on the shelf. Will you be receiving more of the advanced model soon?”

“Oh? I’ve sold out of those already? Please wait a moment.” I pulled out my wand so no one would know I was the Enchanter (my wandless ability and blue hand would have been a dead give away) and silently summoned a small box from the back. After I caught it, I put my wand up. Digging into the box, I pulled out the more advanced model of the calculator and handed it to the girl. “There you go. I should probably check on the rest of my stock.”



“Thank you, sir,” she said before she leaned in and whispered, “Good disguise. I wouldn’t have recognized you if I hadn’t known.”

I smiled at her, ever the friendly shop-keeper I was. “Enjoy your calculator at school, Miss Granger.” Since my friend had finished at Hogwarts, I wondered which school that would be. She probably was just saying that as an excuse, but I’d ask her later.

Hermione flashed me a smile and turned to go see Ginny and check out. Ginny knew to charge her a single Galleon instead of the regular price of two Galleons and three Sickles. All of my friends only paid a single Galleon for items when I used their ideas.

I smiled to myself as I surveyed the shelves and resupplied the top sellers. I had told my closest friends what I was doing and had sworn them to secrecy. My status as a Mage was now public knowledge and privacy was hard to come by. They had also given me a few ideas on things to carry. Hermione had been the one to suggest calculators. She had also suggested laptop computers, but I was still working on them. They were a little more delicate, but I thought I’d have them working soon. There was also the whole lack of AC problem to run or charge the laptop computers, but I had an idea for a small AC generator where the motor was turned by magic, but the electrical part was shielded. That was still in the prototype stage.

Fred and George came over with lunch and a wink as they welcomed their “new neighbors”. George also stayed for a few minutes to help restock shelves when I brought the boxes of charmed items out from the back storeroom to the front.

At the end of the day as I was about to shut and lock the front door, a woman with a small child hurried in. “I would like to enquire about your custom work, Mr ...”

“O’Donald, ma’am. What can I help you with?”

“I need a spell, or something,” she said with a little desperation, “to help me track a child.”

“Tracking charms are taught at most schools. Not that I don’t want the work, but one of those won’t do for a child?” I had to admit I was curious.

“No.” Exhaustion added to her desperation. “We think it’s accidental magic that cancels them, but he likes to run and hide, and well, it scares us when we can’t find him. Can you please help me?”

“Hmm, he does look lively,” I bantered while I asked Magic about how to make a permanent tracking charm. “If you’ll excuse me a moment, let me go to the back to make a Floo call to our Enchanter and see what he says.” Ginny nodded at me and I knew she would watch over them.

In the back storage room, I took a seat for a moment. The answer finally came to me and I considered how to work it. I decided that what really need was some gold, so I searched and found an old gold ring in a box of junk I’d brought in so I’d have base materials to transfigure.

I went back out front. The woman looked at me hopefully. Ginny was watching her as she tallied up her sales sheet.

“Ma’am, we can create a ring that can always be tracked. With a special charm to make it stick to him and an auto-sizing charm so it grows with him, you should always be able to find him with a simple charm.”

“Oh thank you,” she almost cried in happiness. “My husband and I would be so thankful.”

“There will be a twenty Galleon charge for the spells and the ring. Also, for all custom work, we require the requester to sign a magical oath saying the work will never be purposefully used to harm anyone.”

She looked shocked. “How could this ever be used to harm anyone?”

“I don’t know, but that is our policy. The fee is for our work, but we also desire to make sure our work does not hurt others. I can show you the oath before you decide.”

She nodded so I pulled out a copy of the standard oath I had already written and she read it. “I can agree to that.” She signed the oath before pulling out twenty Galleons and handing them to Ginny while I went to the back to “go get the work from the Enchanter”.

About five minutes later, I returned with the ring that had a few special runes on it and a slip of parchment with three spells on it: one to stick it to the boy, one to remove it from him, and one to show the direction of the ring. The woman was very grateful and left her desperation behind as she hurried home.

Ginny locked up behind the woman and looked at me with a very tired look. “I can’t believe I agreed to this. I am so tired.” She brought the cash box with her as we went into the back. “Bloody hell! I knew we had made a lot of sales today, but they cleaned us out!” She was shocked at our almost bare shelves in the stock room and work room.

“Fortunately, I’ve got enough extras at home all ready to come here, but I’m going to need to go buy more items for day after tomorrow and enchant them. What I’d like to know is if every day will be like this or if it will slow down?”

She nodded. “I know. I can help you for now, but soon, you’ll be here by yourself.”

An idea was forming in my head, but I wasn’t sure about it.

“What? I can see you’re thinking something,” she said, eyeing me with curiosity.

“I need someone I can trust and someone who is reasonably good with maths. What does your mother do doing the day?”

Ginny looked at me and then started to laugh so hard she almost fell over. “You want to work with my mother? Your future mother-in-law?”

"Well, I know I can trust her and that's a big advantage. We'd just need to work out what a good wage is. Hmm, I wonder if..."

A knock on our door interrupted us. I cautiously went out to the front and Ginny followed me. We were both still in our glamours. Peering around a sign and out the door, I saw the twins. I opened the door with a grin.

"Come on in." I locked the door behind them.

"So, did you do well?" Fred asked.

"Yeah, we saw people streaming in and out all day, just like on school letter days," George added.

"Come to the back," Ginny de-aged, her hair lightened, and her freckles all came back as I canceled her glamours. I took mine off too. "Look," she commanded as she pointed around the back room. "This was full this morning."

The twins looked at each other before they pulled out their wands and created chairs for themselves across from ours.

"We're not surprised," George said as he sat.

"Yeah, so many of those in power, and you know who we mean, don't really think about who makes up the magical world." Fred looked as strange as his brother without his characteristic grin.

"What do you mean?" Ginny asked. I was curious, too.

"What my brother means is that they never think about the percentages of the population."

"You know, Pure, Half, Muggle-born, Squib. The last three of those kinds understand all of what you offer, Harry. Guess what percentage those three make up of the entire population?"

“Or,” the other twin quickly continued, “guess what percentage the Purebloods make up, the ones who won’t understand most of your products?”

“If my year at Hogwarts is anything to go by, I’d say half of the population would be Purebloods,” I answered.

Fred shook his head. “And you would be wrong. You had an exceptional class, old man. Ignoring the Squibs, which I’ve never seen a count for, Purebloods only make up about a quarter of the population and it’s shrinking fast.”

“Half-bloods make up about half of the population now with the last about twenty-five percent being Muggle-borns. We would bet Purebloods will only be about ten percent of the population in twenty or thirty years as many of the Purebloods are older and it has become difficult to create Pureblood children if both parents are from Britain and if you’re concerned about inbreeding. You and Ginny are some of the few exceptions left who don’t have that worry, he hastily added.”

“What we’re trying to say,” Fred jumped back in, “is that the majority of the Wizarding World will know and want your products. Better still, no one else is selling your fancy gadgets that work inside highly magical areas. That’s brilliant for you.”

“And those in power will blithely ignore you for a while because they’re the ones who don’t understand what your little disks are for or why someone might want a, a calculator?”

I nodded to George.

“So take advantage of the situation and watch out for them trying to pass laws to stop your expansion, probably in the guise of secrecy laws.”

“Thanks guys, I really appreciate the analysis. I wished they’d teach that at Hogwarts,” I told them.

They both laughed. “Sorry, old man.”

“Yeah, that would upset the apple cart.”

“I can see that.”

“Of course,” George looked like he was thinking out loud, “if you can hang on for ten or twenty years, the problem may solve itself as the population changes.”

“True,” Fred chimed in. “The Purebloods took a major hit when you removed Riddle from circulation and some very prominent Purebloods suddenly became Squibs.”

“Narcissa Malfoy’s reaction was priceless when she learned her husband and only son were now Squibs.”

“She was only loud then, and that reaction was not as priceless as when she tried to remove her money from Gringotts and then tried to use magic inside the back when she found her vault empty.”

I broke into the twins reminiscing. “I had heard her vault wasn’t empty, but was full of garbage, which knocked her out because of its smell.” All four of us started laughing and we continued to do so for nearly a minute.

It occurred to me they could answer my earlier question. “I do need one other bit of information. What’s the normal rate to pay someone to be a clerk in a store?”

Fred laughed. “Yeah, Mrs O’Donald here has to go back to school, doesn’t she?” Ginny stuck her tongue out at her brother.

“To answer your question,” George said with a grin, “around two Galleons an hour, or a little less if they don’t have much experience. If it helps, two Galleons an hour works out to be almost five thousand Galleons a year, assuming they work six days a week with two weeks off a year. You might do better to find two helpers, each working a little less than full time.”

I pondered that. I could easily afford that, even if sales were only half of what we did today. I wondered what their reaction would be to my idea for “help”. “Do you think I could hire your mother to help me?”

They looked at each other and then fell out of their chairs laughing. Ginny joined them in hysterical laughter.

“What is it with you Weasleys?” I huffed.

“Sorry, Harry,” George said when he could talk again.

“Yeah, sorry, but better you than us.”

“What my brother is trying to say is that it might work for you since you’re not her son, but be careful and tell her up front that you’re the boss or she will start to tell you what to do.”

Ginny nodded her agreement, her grin still very large.

“I’m not saying it wouldn’t work out, Harry, just that you need to be very clear who’s the boss and what her duties are if you hire her.”

“Also, Harry, you should hire another person in the next few weeks, whether it is our mum or someone else. The school letters normally come out the first week in August and you’ll see even more customers then.”

I looked around and thought about all of that. A space expansion charm might be a good thing too. There was so much to do. “Thanks a lot, you’ve been very helpful.”

“No problem, Harry...”

“We’d do the same for any troll that Ginny married.”

Ginny pulled out her wand and half-heartedly tried to Bat-Bogey them as she laughed, not really angry. I laughed at the three playing around. Life was really turning out well.

It was mid-September and my shop had survived the back-to-school rush -- barely. Lee Jordan had an older sister who had been looking for work and I had hired her. Molly, as she wanted me to call her now, also had been very helpful. She didn't know much about what we were selling until I demonstrated everything -- several times -- but she was very friendly and yet strict in making sure everyone paid for what was in their hands before they walked out the door.

Arthur had been like a kid in a candy store when I gave him a tour and demo, not to mention several sample products for him to "study". What a great family!

Remus and Tonks had also dropped by and I gave them personal demos. Tonks took a portable music player with her for those times she had guard duty. Remus took a CD player so he'd have something different to listen to while grading papers. He also eyed the small portable TVs, but decided he didn't really need one. He did get several calculators for gifts for the other professors. He was still enjoying teaching Defense.

Thanks to magic, I had doubled the size of the inside of my store and stock room. That had allowed us to barely keep up with customer demand for the commercial products I enchanted. I had worked like a demon to stay ahead. Fortunately, once September came, business slowed to half of the original volume and life became more fun again.

I locked up the shop at seven, having sent Molly home an hour ago, and went home myself.

After a quick dinner by myself, I cleaned up and transported myself to Ginny's room at Hogwarts, two hours earlier than normal. Her being Head Girl made this a lot easier than if she still lived in a dorm room.

We walked out of her room and into the Gryffindor common room. I greeted a number of students there before we went out the Portrait Hole and walked around, checking out a few closets along the way, just for fun.

It was a little after nine when we rounded a corner on the fifth floor and almost literally ran into the Headmaster. "Albus," I greeted him by



his first name, as he always did to me, and kept on walking with Ginny on my arm.

After a moment of shock, he found his voice. "Harry! What are you doing here?"

We stopped and turned back to face him. "I'm spending some time with my fiancée," I answered as if it should have been obvious. I was planning to have some fun with him, so I thought this was a good start.

"As you are no longer a student, you are not supposed to be here without permission."

"That's all right, I gave myself permission." He gave me a disappointed look, so I went for my next tweak. "If Merlin walked in the castle right now, would you toss him out?" I didn't bother to ask if he could kick a Mage out; we both knew he would fail.

He looked surprised by my question before he chuckled after a moment. "You are trying to use your Mage status then?"

"Trying?" I asked and raised an eyebrow at him to drive my point home. He nodded and tilted his head a little to show he conceded my point. "I only visit for a couple of hours every night."

"You've done this before?" He looked alarmed and also looked at Ginny.

"Every night of the term."

"Miss Weasley!" The disappointment was back in his voice.

"Albus, if you plan to punish her, then you'll need to punish the Head Boy and probably all of Gryffindor too. My visits are probably one of the worst kept secrets in the castle." It was just that all the students decided it was something the professors really didn't need to know. Of course, the fact that I regularly brought candy from Honeydukes with me probably helped them to see things my way.

He looked back at me for a long moment. "Then I suppose that my running across you was not an accident."

I smiled and flicked a finger to make my eyes twinkle at him. His head jerked just slightly in surprise before he chuckled. Having had my fun, I canceled the charm.

"Very amusing, Harry. Since this is not an accident, might I talk you into joining me for some tea in my office?"

I noticed he was being polite so I acted in kind. "We shall join you." I automatically invited Ginny and Dumbledore didn't protest. He nodded and led the way.

"So what led you to allow yourself to be found?" he asked.

"I figured the secret would be found out soon anyway and I wanted to make sure no one got in trouble for it. Plus ... I've heard certain rumors about me that have your name attached to them."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "I was about to try to contact you soon." He led us up the stairs and into his office.

"I know." At his questioning look, I added, "One does not become a Mage without developing some contacts at the Ministry. They are, obviously, very discreet lest they earn my wrath and I prank them into humiliation." Ginny and I sat on his couch in the sitting area, leaving a nice wingback chair for him.

"You threaten them with pranks?" He sounded amazed.

"I wouldn't hurt them, but I do a small demonstration like change all of their skin to look like a candy cane or remove their nose for a few minutes to show them that mentioning my name in the wrong place is a bad idea. I also point out that I can make the effect happen for a few minutes here and there at the most embarrassing times. In exchange, they give me information about what's happening before it would have become public anyway, especially with the Wizengamot. So you see, nothing bad; I just want to know about possible problems before they occur."

“And if you found out about a possible problem?”

I knew what he was fishing for: Was I going Dark? “I find that a little encouragement in the right ears solves a lot of problems. I’ve heard you’ve been known to do the same thing,” I told him, throwing the burden to him.

He cleared his throat as he served us tea. “I am the Chief Warlock, I’m supposed to give my opinion on legislation.”

“I’ve heard you’re present about eight percent of the time. I doubt you can do much that way,” I said dryly. To his credit, he didn’t try to correct me. In fact, he changed the subject, the wimp.

“How have you been keeping yourself busy, Harry? I haven’t heard much about you in the news.”

I shrug. “You know, a little research, a little investing. I’ve even had a little fun, although free time has been hard to come by lately. I really prefer to keep my name out of the news. My private life is just that -- private.”

Dumbledore realized he wasn’t going to get any more out of me on that topic, so he looked at Ginny for a moment and smiled. “I assume your wedding is still planned for this coming summer? I believe that was what Molly said the last time I talked to her.”

“Yes, Professor,” Ginny answered, the wedding being her forte. “At the moment, mid-July seems to work best. Would you like an invitation?” she asked with a perfectly straight face, as if not inviting him was a real possibility.

Part of me wanted to laugh at that. Molly would have had kittens if Ginny didn’t invite Dumbledore.

“Why yes; that would be delightful.” Dumbledore put his tea cup down. “Harry, there is something very important I need to discuss with you.”

I had wondered how long he would go before he got to the main point. My contact in the Department of Mysteries had warned me this was coming.

"The Ministry needs your help with a project. Would you be willing to help them out if I put you touch with the proper person?" He glanced at Ginny. I got the message that he wasn't comfortable discussing the details with her here. That was just too bad as far as I was concerned.

"I assume this is about Riddle?" I boldly asked.

He sighed. "Yes. They've made little progress. Some might even say none at all," he said sadly.

"So you're saying they're incompetent and need me to bail them out - for a third time." I didn't bother to pull punches. I doubted I could surprise the old man about this topic.

"That was a bit crudely phrased, but I can understand why you might think of it that way."

I looked at Ginny and saw her look at me and roll her eyes. We had talked over the summer about the possibility of them coming to me. I was ready for this.

"Very well," I told him after a moment, as if I had to think about it. As he perked up a little in hope, I added, "I will offer some free advice now, or if you want me to fix it all as a Mage, there is a condition for my help."

He pursed his lips slightly as he thought about that. I guess he was not surprised I would not do it all for free. "What is your free advice?" he finally asked.

"Shove Riddle's body through the Veil of Death in the Department of Mysteries and call it good."

"I wish it were that simple, Harry," he said gravely. "You should understand that is not enough. I hope you remember what happened in the Chamber of Secrets with Miss Weasley?"

Ginny shuddered and I held her hand tightly. "I do."

"The diary was a Horcrux. I believe there are four more existing," he paused dramatically, "although there may also be a fifth, but I'm not sure about that."

"I can help a little if you'll give me a moment." He nodded. "Kreacher?"

The elf popped in. "You called, Master?"

"Yes, Kreacher. Please go to the trunk in the attic where we put all of the Dark items when we cleaned house. There was a heavy gold locket with a snake on it. Please find that and bring it me." The elf popped away. I saw Dumbledore staring at me.

"You've had one all this time?"

"The Blacks have had one ever since Regulus stole it before he died, or so Kreacher explained to me."

Kreacher popped back in and handed me the locket by the chain. "Thank you. You've done your usual good job." He bowed and left.

"Your humane treatment of him has worked wonders," Dumbledore commented.

"It did help," I agreed, "but the real fix was to help him work through what had happened to him in the past and to point out that I am his real master and for me to act like it." I handed the locket over. "There's one of them, I believe."

"Thank you, Harry."

"I would suggest throwing that through the Veil. Now, you mentioned a possible one you weren't sure of?"

"Yes." He looked very sad now. "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but I believe you might be one, inadvertently."

"Ah, in my curse scar?" I noted that Ginny did not look pleased to hear that.

Dumbledore nodded.

"That might have been true, but I don't believe it to be any more."

"Oh? Why not?"

I smiled. "Think back to what I told you about how I became a Mage. I was struck with lightning and then I was a lot more powerful. It would fit that I probably was one, but the lightning removed it or released it. In turn, that either removed a block the Horcrux had on my magic, or released it and added to my magic. There was also a moment after I was hit that I'm not sure I was alive. If that was true, I suspect that unbound the Horcrux from me. Take your pick of theories, but I believe I'm not one now -- assuming I ever was one."

Dumbledore thought that through. "Did you ever have any pains in your scar in that summer after you were hit by lightning and before you put Riddle to sleep?"

My jaw dropped open. Why hadn't I ever thought of that? "No. Now that you make me think of it, not at all. I attributed that to me being able to block whatever he was doing, but the real reason must be that the connection between us had been removed." Ginny smiled, pleased to hear that logic. I lightly squeezed her hand to show my agreement.

"I believe I will agree that you are not one any longer. With this locket in hand, there are now only three left. Will you help us, Harry?" He persisted in asking.

"On one condition." I really didn't think they'd agree, but I really didn't want to get mixed up in all of this. The Wizarding World needed to grow up and do things for itself. I would force that if they made me.

Dumbledore continued to give me disappointed looks, even though I never reacted to them.

"If you want me to find all the Horcruxes and destroy them along with Riddle, then I must be given total control of the Ministry of Magic for one year. One year where I can lawfully do anything I want, just as if I were king at the time of King Arthur."

Dumbledore's jaw dropped. I had officially surprised him and I chuckled. Ginny joined me.

"That's too high a price, Harry," he said when he found his voice. "No one man should have that much power. Why?"

"Because if I must step in and be a parent to our society, then things are too wrong, or too far gone to be saved. I shall need to redo it all. While I'm 'fixing' Riddle, I'll also 'fix' the Wizarding society in Britain. Ireland is on its own since it has its own Ministry of Magic, but I will fix magical England, Wales, and Scotland. It's time for them to grow up and I'll make it happen by dragging our world into the twenty-first century and removing all the bias and stupidity by fixing the bad laws as well as recreating the Ministry to have a more representative form of government. That's the price of my help and it's nonnegotiable."

"Harry..."

"Sorry, Albus, but that's the only offer you get. If you decide to take me up on it, I'm sure you'll find a way to let me know. Thank you for the tea and conversation. Have a pleasant evening." It was very nice to be in charge of meetings, I thought with amusement. I stood and Ginny stood with me. With a thought of a little magic, I transported us to her room.

"Do you still think they'll take your offer?" she asked me seriously.

"No, those in power won't want to give it up; but enough of that. I want a little more relaxing fun than playing verbal tennis with an old man."

"That can be arranged." She led us over to a comfy chair and pushed me into it before she sat on my lap.

I loved being Head Boy last year and her being Head Girl this year. These rooms were so much more comfortable and private than broom closets.

The evening after Ginny finished her NEWTs, I showed up at Hogwarts with a surprise in my pocket. Ginny hugged and kissed me as usual, but I could tell she was mentally exhausted.

"Come with me," I told her as I grabbed her hand and led her outside.

We passed McGonagall on the way; she nodded to us as a greeting. No one was ever surprised when they saw me at the school. I think most of the staff looked at me as if I was on staff as night security or something. The fact that I stopped a couple of older Slytherins from trying to force a third year Hufflepuff into giving them his spending money the evening before a Hogsmeade weekend trip probably helped. I stuck them to the ceiling upside down and the only way they could be released was if they told the truth about what they did to the little 'Puff. I understand that Hogwarts became a kinder and gentler place after that.

Outside and with a couple hours before dark, I pulled a twig out of my pocket and wandlessly expanded it back to normal size before I gave it to her.

"For me?" she asked amazed as she ran her hand over the broom.

I thought it should have been obvious since it had a red bow on it, to say nothing of also having her name emblazoned in gold inlay on it. "Congratulations on finishing Hogwarts and for landing a tryout with the Harpies. I hope this will help you." I enjoyed watching her rapt attention on the present.

She ran her hand over the smooth purple wood. Seeing her name running the length of the broom brought a smile to her lips. "It looks beautiful, Harry. I can't believe you made this for me."

"Try riding it," I suggested. "However, be aware that I made it for a Chaser. It won't fly like a normal broom. For example, once you get the hang of it, you'll find that it'll turn on a Knut."



Ginny took it from my hands and I removed the bow. She sat on it and her smile widened. "That's really comfortable."

I pulled the second broom I'd ever made out of my pocket. Ginny's was my third. "It has to be if you're to do high speed turns. I've put all kinds of control spells and inertia compensation spells on it. No commercial broom should be able to match it, especially its acceleration."

"Not even the Firebolt 2?"

"Nope," I said with a grin. "That's made for distance racing, not for Chasers like this broom is."

Ginny put both hands on the broom and shot off the ground. She screamed, but I could tell it was out of joy at the speed. I saw a few people standing around to watch us. I quickly took off too. Her broom had more speed, but I had more experience and control. Once she learned that broom, she would beat me every time until I created an equivalent broom for me.

We flew around for as long as we could. I gave her as many pointers as possible and she had almost mastered flying it when we quit because it was getting too dark to see well.

Back on the ground, she gave me a hug and wonderful kiss. "Thanks, Harry!"

"You deserve the best," I told her, and I wanted the best for her. Of course, in about three weeks, it would become my official duty to provide for her as her husband. I was looking forward to that and many years of us being together.

"There's Mummy!" a little hand pointed.

"Yes, that's her. Keep a close eye on her. This is her last game and she won't be flying here any more." Our youngest, Sarah Lily, nodded seriously, or as serious as a four year-old could. She looked so much

like Ginny it was unreal. Sarah also stole everyone's heart, much like her mother.

Our two boys, Ian James and Stephen Arthur, nine and seven, watched from our box seats in the stadium. They were already becoming Quidditch-crazy and to have a mother who was a Quidditch star was "the best" to them. Both looked mostly like me. Ian's hair was dark like mine, while Stephen's was a dark auburn. They were good sons.

This was Ginny's last game as a professional -- the end of a twelve-year career. She had made the first reserve Chaser for the Harpies right out of Hogwarts, something she was very proud of. She had stayed on the reserves for only her first season, becoming a starter in her second year.

Today, the Harpies were playing the Cannons, so Ron had two reasons to be here, Fred and George also joined us. Ron had brought Hermione and their one child, a girl name Jayne Marie, who was six. The twins still had yet to marry and I wondered if they'd ever settle down.

George leaned over. "Harry, I think it's time for you go put in another appearance at the Ministry. I've recently heard rumors there you won't like."

I snorted. "Which ones? The ones about how they're treating the centaurs or the ones on how they want to start taxing all goods that originate in the Muggle world?"

"I hadn't heard the ones about the centaurs," George replied.

Ron jumped up and started yelling at the Cannon's Keeper. The Harpy Chasers, led by his sister, were scoring almost every shot on goal. Hermione only made half-hearted attempts to calm him, knowing that the game environment just egged him on.

"I suppose it's time for my yearly appearance to smack some sense into them," I said tiredly. The Purebloods still had a slight majority in the Wizengamot, although they were having to fight hard to keep it,

losing a seat or two every year to younger Halfbloods as the older Purebloods died and were replaced. "Maybe it's time I just disbanded all the bigots so we could start with some fresh minds." The Ministry had never taken me up on my offer to "fix" everything.

"Yes!" Fred shouted as Ginny scored again. "It's either that or you need to finish buying the Daily Prophet so you can ensure everyone knows just how bad they really are. I still don't understand why you only bought a third of it and then stopped."

"Mostly because I couldn't buy any more without doing bodily damage to people to force them to sell. Almost all of that business that I own, I bought shortly after all the Death Eaters turned into Squibs and some of those families sold their shares in order to raise money. Since then, very little of the company has been up for sale," I explained.

"Harry, let's pretend that the third you do own includes the printing presses," George said while avidly watching his sister dodge a Bludger. "How about a little charm work on them that does something like Veritaserum does to a person? Then they would print the truth even if that wasn't what the reporters wrote."

"Brilliant prank, George."

"Thanks, brother."

I snuckled. "That is brilliant." I thought about how that might be done and conversed with Magic. A minute later, I looked at George. "No matter what Fred says, you really are brilliant at times," I said with a grin.

The twins both laughed.

"So you know of a way?" Fred asked.

"It'll be a combination of runes and charms," I answered. "It won't force the truth out like Veritaserum, but I can make them accept only the truth and ignore what the people there know to be lies."

"So tomorrow's edition will be a lot more truthful?"

I shrugged. "You know they'll notice that what the presses printed isn't what they wrote. So it may be like that only for a single edition. Then they'll probably bring in curse breakers to fix it. It will be a battle back and forth between us, me making it print the truth and making it harder to break, and them trying to break it as well as prevent me from sneaking into the building and changing it." I gave an evil grin. "Sounds like fun, actually. I haven't had a challenge recently."

"True, you've got your business running so smoothly with some good people in place."

"I think the only business with more money now is Gringotts," the other twin remarked.

"Here it goes, gents," I remarked.

"What?" I got in stereo. A second later, everyone else saw what I already had. The two Seekers shot off across the pitch and eight seconds later it was over. The Harpies had beat the Cannons 410-70. Sarah squealed her delight and the boys were yelling too. In our box, only Ron looked sad.

Ginny flew up to the box and I pulled her and her "Ginny Special" broom in. She was a bit stinky, but she was my wonderful wife and the mother of my children. I kissed her soundly. Sarah was squealing "Mummy!" while the boys were making "yucky faces" at us.

"You were spectacular today," I told her with a grin.

"It'll be a shame to give it up, but it's getting harder and harder to keep up that level of play." Ginny picked up Sarah.

Everyone came over and congratulated Ginny, even Ron.

"What are you going to do now, Ginny?" Hermione asked.

When Ginny didn't answer for a moment, I spoke up. "I was thinking she could come with me on a little adventure tonight, sorta to watch my back."

Hermione groaned, "Not another adventure," while the twins' faces lit up in glee.

Ginny looked interested. "Doing what?"

"I'll explain after we get home and put the kids to bed." I brushed her cheek with a kiss and whispered in her ear, "And after I help you shower."

"Daddy, quit making Mummy turn red," demanded a little voice.

I patted Sarah's head and told the boys to come over so I could transport my family home. Life wasn't perfect, but it was very good.

(the end)

((A/N: Sorry, no sequel. It is what it is. About all that really could be added would be how society changed, and that's not overly exciting. :) I've tried to put a few clues in this chapter. For the rest, you'll have to use your imagination. As for the Horcruxes, they were never found and Sleeping Ugly was eventually sent through the Veil.

Here we see why we really can't write long super!harry stories: everything is really much too easy if you let him have the power of Merlin or otherwise make it easy for him to control magic. He quickly fixes all the wrongs and has a good time doing it. There is little tension in the story. That's not necessarily bad, as sometimes it's nice to have a "feel good" story that you can just enjoy with a mug of hot chocolate or a cold Dr Pepper (as long as you don't spray it on your keyboard, :) but it's hard to get a major story in an environment like this. (Jeconais manages it in "Hope", but all the tension/problems are social and not magical, which is about the only way to do it.) So, for the bigger stories, you really do need to handicap Harry in some way, or make his "special power" very focused or limited. That's my theory on super!Harry. :)

Again, a big thanks to my beta editor Wolfs\_Scream! He always makes me look like a better writer than I am.

I hope everyone who made it this far enjoyed it. -- Kevin))